

1350 L 12

THE
The Ax laid to the Root
DISCOVERIES
OF
Christian Priestcraft.

(Price One Shilling.)

E H T

Next Week will be Publish'd

DISCOURSE II.

O N

The CRAFT of TYTHES.

*They neither plough, nor sow; and yet they reap
The Fat of the Land and suck the Poor.*

SHAKESPEARE.

(Price One Shilling.)

The Ax laid to the Root
OF
CHRISTIANPRIESTCRAFT.
In FOUR DISCOURSES.

By a LAYMAN.

DISCOURSE I.
ON THE
IMPORTANCE of TRUTH,
AND THE
ORIGIN of CHURCH-GRANDEUR.

*They themselves esteem
Made for themselves, and all the World for them:
While Heaven's great Law, given for their Guide, appears
Just, or unjust, but as it waits on their's;
Us'd but to give an Echo to their Words,
Power to their Wills and Edges to their Swords,
To varnish all their Errors; and secure
The Ills they act and all the World endure.*

DENHAM.

LONDON:

Printed for T. COOPER, at the *Globe* in Paternoster-
Row. MDCCXLII.

The Appeal to the Root

OF

CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

In Four Discourses

By a LAYMAN

DISCOURSE I.

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH

AND THE

CRISIS OF CHURCH-GOVERNMENT

4.

6

57



LONDON

Printed by T. Cooper, at the Office of the



T H E
P R E F A C E .

AS none but Methodists among our modern Teachers pretend to Inspiration, and even the most orthodox of our Cathedral-Doctors are not exempt from Errors and Frailties, my Presumption, I hope, will be thought the less, in entering upon the

the Service without a Call ; especially, since I do not entrench upon the Trade, since I challenge no Preferment, since I pretend to no Pay, and, whether held qualified to officiate, or not, since I shall continue a Layman still.

But tho' I make thus bold to intrude into the Chair, I have not the Vanity to copy the peculiar Excellencies of those who are authoris'd to fill it: No ; their quaint and subtile Distinctions, their exact and methodical Divisions and Sub-divisions, and, above all, their profound Penetration into the most obscure Mysteries, are a Flight above my Pitch ; and a plain Series of manifest vulgar

gar Truths is all my Readers are to expect from me——A Sort of Common-Sense-Divinity, which, by the Advantage of a Stile and Manner, perhaps not always to be found in Effays of this Nature, may prove almost as agreeable to the Public, as Common-Sense-Politics; tho' so near to the Eye, that the Perspective of poring Theologists quite overlooks it.

I am, therefore, 'tis possible, more in Danger of being held an Enemy, than a Rival to the Reverends of the Age; and, as such, must expect to be used; that is to say with their usual Clemency and Charity: A Consideration which, in the Reign of Pope *Sacheverel*, might have

have had some Weight with me, but, at present, gives me no Uneasiness at all! Thank God their Hands are tied: and as to their Heads let them make the most of them! Against Fact, Truth and Reason, a *Sanhedrim* of *Solomon's* would cabal, preach, write, and dogmatise in vain!

DIS-



DISCOURSE I.

ON THE

IMPORTANCE of TRUTH.

GENTLEMEN,

BEFORE we proceed with
our immediate Subject,
give me leave to entertain
you with one of the most
beautiful Passages that is
to be found among all the *Jewish* Wri-
tings: Indulge me, likewise, in presenting
it entire, tho' the Conclusion only suits
B with

with our present Purpose; the whole being so exceedingly fine, that the Omission of the smallest Part would impair the Excellency and Harmony of all the rest: Neither receive it with the less Regard, because it is apocryphal: In Enquiries after Truth, Names are of no Authority; and what is in it self just, convincing and sublime, carries with it its own Authority, and neither asks, nor needs any other——'Tis a Quotation from *Esdra*s, and is as follows.

'Now when *Darius* reign'd, he made a great Feast unto all his Subjects, and unto all his Household, and unto all the Princes of *Media* and *Persia*, and to all Governours, and Captains, and Lieutenants that were under him, from *India* to *Ethiopia*, of an hundred, twenty and seven Princes; and, when they had eaten, and drunken, and, being satisfied, were gone Home, then *Darius* the King went into

into his Bed-Chamber, and slept, and soon after awaked.

‘ Then three young Men, that were of the Guard that kept the King’s Body, spake one to another: Let every one of us speak a Sentence: He that shall overcome, and whose Sentence shall seem wiser than the others, unto him shall the King *Darius* give great Gifts, and great Things in Token of Victory; as to be cloth’d in Purple, to drink in Gold, and to sleep upon Gold, and a Chariot with Bridles of Gold, and an Head-Tire of fine Linnen, and a Chain about his Neck, and he shall sit next to *Darius*, because of his Wisdom, and shall be called *Darius* his Cousin.

‘ And then every one wrote his Sentence, sealed it, and laid it under the King *Darius* his Pillow; and said, when the King is risen, some will give him the Writings; and of whose side the King, and the Three Princes of *Persia*, shall

judge, that his Sentence is the wisest, to him shall the Victory be given, as was appointed.

The First wrote, **Wine is the strongest.**

The Second wrote, **The King is the strongest.**

The Third wrote, **Women are the strongest; but above all Things, Truth bears away the Victory.**

Now, when the King was risen up, they took their Writings, and delivered them unto him, and so he read them; and, sending forth, he called all the Princes of *Persia*, and *Media*, and all the Governors, and the Captains, and the Lieutenants, and the Chief Officers; and set him down in the royal Seat of Judgment; and the Writings were read before them: And he said, call the young Men, and they shall declare their own Sentences. So they were called, and

came in; and he said unto them, declare unto us your Mind concerning the Writings. Then began the First, who had spoken of the Strength of Wine, and he said thus.

‘ O ye Men! How exceeding strong is Wine? it causeth all Men to err that drink it: It maketh the Mind of the King, and the Father-less-Child to be all one; of the Bond-Man, and of the Free-Man; of the poor Man, and of the rich. It turneth, also, every Thought into Jollity and Mirth, so that a Man remembreth neither Sorrow, nor Debt; and it maketh every Heart rich, so that a Man remembreth neither King nor Governor; and it maketh to speak all Things by Talents; and, when they are in their Cups, they forget their Love both to Friends and Brethren; and, a little after, draw out Swords. But, when they are from their Wine, they remember not what they have done. O ye Men! Is

not

not Wine the strongest, that inforceth to do thus?

And, when he had so spoken, he held his Peace.

Then the Second, that had spoken of the Strength of the King, began to say.

O ye Men! Do not Men excel in Strength, that bear Rule over Sea and Land, and all Things in them? But yet the King is more mighty, for he is Lord of all these Things, and hath Dominion over them, and whatsoever he commandeth them, that they do. If he bid them make war against another, they do it: If he send them out against the Enemies they go, and break down Mountains, Walls, and Towers: They slay, and are slain, and transgress not the King's Commandment: If they get the Victory they bring all to the King, as well the Spoil, as all things else. Likewise for those

those that are no Soldiers, and have not to do with Wars, but use Husbandry, when they have reaped again that which they had sown, they bring it to the King, and compel one another to pay Tribute to the King, and yet he is but one Man. If he commands to kill, they kill; if he commands to spare, they spare; if he commands to smite, they smite; if he commands to make desolate, they make desolate; if he commands to build, they build; if he commands to cut down, they cut down; if he commands to plant, they plant; so all his People and his Armies obey him: Furthermore, he lieth down, he eateth, and drinketh, and taketh his Rest; and these keep Watch round about him; neither may any one depart, and do his own Business, neither disobey they him in any thing. O ye Men! How should not the King be mightiest, when, in such sort, he is obeyed? and he held his Tongue.

Then

‘ Then the Third, who had spoken of Women, and of the Truth, began to speak.

‘ O ye Men ! It is not the great King, nor the Multitude of Men, neither is it Wine that excelleth. Who is it then that ruleth them, or hath the Lordship over them ? Are they not Women ? Women have borne the King, and all the People that bear Rule by Sea, and Land : Even of them came they ; and they nourish’d them up that planted Vineyards, from whence the Wine cometh : These, also, make Garments for Men, these bring Glory to Men ; and without Women cannot Men be ; yea, and if Men have gathered together Gold, and Silver, or any other goodly thing, do they not love a Woman who is comely in Favour and Beauty ? And, letting all those Things go, do not they gape, and, even with open Mouth, fix their Eyes fast on her ? And, have not all Men more Desire unto her, than unto Silver, or Gold,

or

or any goodly Thing whatsoever? A Man leaveth his own Father, who brought him up, and his own Country, and cleaveth unto his Wife. He sticks not to spend his Life with his Wife, and remembreth neither Father, nor Mother, nor Country. By this also, you must know that Women have Dominion over you: Do ye not labour, and toil, and give, and bring all to the Woman? Yea, a Man taketh his Sword, and goeth his Way to rob, and to steal, to sail upon the Sea, and upon Rivers; and looketh upon a Lion, and goeth in the Darknes; and when he hath stolen, spoil'd, and robb'd, he bringeth it to his Love. Wherefore, a Man loveth his Wife better than Father, or Mother; yea, many there be that have run out of their Wits for Women, and become Servants for their Sakes. Many also, have perished, have err'd, and sinn'd for Women; and, now, do you not believe me? Is not the King great in his Power? Do not all Regions fear to touch him? Yet did I see him and

Apamè, the King's Concubine, the Daughter of the admirable *Bartacus*, sitting at the right Hand of the King, and taking the Crown from the King's Head, and setting it upon her own Head? She, also, struck the King with her Left-Hand; and yet for all this, the King gap'd, and gaz'd upon her with open Mouth; if she laugh'd upon him, he laugh'd also; but if she took any Displeasure at him, the King was fain to flatter, that she might be reconciled to him again. O ye Men! How can it be, but Woman should be strong, seeing they do thus?

'Then the King and Princes looked one upon another: So he began to speak of the Truth.

'O ye Men! Are not Women strong? Great is the Earth, high is the Heaven, swift is the Sun in his Course, for he compasseth the Heavens round about, and fetcheth his Course again to his own Place in one Day. Is he not great that
I maketh

maketh these Things? Therefore, great is the Truth, and stronger than all Things. All the Earth calleth upon the Truth, and the Heaven blesteth it; all Works shake, and tremble at it, and, with it, is no unrighteous Thing. Wine is wicked, the King is wicked, Women are wicked, all the Children of Men are wicked, and such are all their wicked Works; and there is no Truth in them: In their Unrighteousness they shall perish. As for the Truth it endureth, and is always strong, it liveth, and conquereth for evermore. With her there is no Acceptance of Persons, or Rewards; but she doth the Things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust, and wicked Things: And all Men do well like of her Works. Neither in her Judgment is any Unrighteousness, and she is the Strength, Kingdom, Power, and Majesty of all Ages. Blessed be the God of Truth!

And with that he held his Peace;
and all the People then shouted and said,
*Great is the Truth, and Mighty above
all Things!*

You have here, Gentlemen, a noble Instance of a powerful Speaker and an honest Audience: The First, in the Presence of the greatest Prince in the World, surrounded with all the Pomp and Splendour of his Throne, and consequently with all the Flattery and Servility that are generally the Growth of Courts, had the singular Courage, to exalt the Dignity and Value of Truth above all Things. The last, candidly, gave Way to Conviction, and gallantly acknowledged themselves subdued by the irresistible Evidence of its Excellency and Importance: Nay, the very Monarch himself, tho' immers'd in all the Luxuries, and Effeminacies habitual to the East, and full-freight with all the Vanities that the Adoration of prostrate Millions could inspire him with, found Leisure to listen to the Voice of

of Truth, and had not only the Goodness to forgive it's Triumph over his utmost Power and Grandeur, but the Generosity to reward it's Champion, as one that had made a real Discovery for the universal Benefit of Mankind——*Then said the King unto him : Ask what thou wilt more than is appointed in the Writing, and we will give it thee.*

This, Gentlemen, was the signal Event of an Oration in Honour of Truth, even among the corrupt and idolatrous *Persians*. And, in my humble Opinion, it cannot be sufficiently admir'd that so remarkable a Passage has, hitherto, met with so little Notice and Observation ; or, indeed, that the whole Writings of this excellent Author have not been stamp'd, by the Fathers of the Church, with the Seal of Inspiration, in common with the rest of the Prophets——Surely, this pathetic Recommendation of Truth could be no Bar to that Honour ; nor the free Expostulations of *Esdra*s with the Angel of God,

God, in many other Chapters of his Work: And, bating these Particulars, I see no Difference between the Spirit of his Revelations, and those that the Sanction of Authority has made more authentic.

But, not to amuse ourselves with a fruitless Enquiry on this Head, there is so happy a Consequence resulting from the Neglect, or Partiality of those reverend Fathers, as very sufficiently atones for the Fact, let the Motive be what it will; *viz.* The incontestable Evidence it has, for so many Ages, produced in Favour of Liberty of Conscience. For, by the Licence we have been indulged with to think for ourselves in Respect to the *Apocrypha*, these Books may be truly said to be the most innocent in the Bible: They have provok'd no Anti-christian Animosities, generated no holy Absurdities, ensnared no Power or Property, or kindled any merciless Persecutions. From whence we may safely conclude, that the same Freedom in all

all speculative Points would be attended with the same Consequences: And, left at large ourselves, we should not think of imposing a Yoke on the Necks of our Brethren.

But to return to my Subject. This great Authority in Favour of Truth, Gentlemen, is set before you to be imitated, as well as admired: What we applaud in others we must transplant, when we have Opportunity, to ourselves. Truth is of as much Consequence in *England*, as it was in *Persia*, and may labour under almost as many Disadvantages. We are taught, from our earliest Years, that 'tis bestow'd on us by Recipe: And hence arises such a stupid Confidence of our being in the Secret, as makes Doubt appear impertinent, and Enquiry superfluous: By which means Reason is rendered entirely useless; and, even tho' the Principles, thus blindly assented to, were true to Demonstration, there cannot be the least Merit in our professing them, since
they

they are so notoriously taken upon Trust— Authorities, long established, may, and ought to be treated with a decent Respect, but have not the least Dominion over our Consciences, or Claim to implicit Obedience.

Such Mistakes, then, at the Threshold of Life, are of terrible Consequence: What we take for Knowledge is, in Fact, Prejudice; and not only prevents the Approaches of Truth, but buries all the Faculties of the Mind under a Load of Ignorance and Error. Hence Men of timorous Dispositions, start at the Light of natural Reason, as at an *Ignis Fatuus*, which would be sure to lead them out of the Way: Others of a warm and sanguine Complexion, consider all Attempts to undeceive them, as so many Affronts to their Understanding; and complement their Pride at the Expence of Information, and Virtue itself: and those of an indolent and luxurious Turn, to flatter their natural Love of Ease, and Aversion

Aversion to Fatigue of all Sorts, think it more eligible to abide in their Mistakes than to be at the Trouble of removing them.

To all these Obstructions from within, there are others from without, equally embarrassing, and equally formidable: Establishments which plead Customs, Laws, and divine Institutions in their Favour, which support Numbers in holy Riot, advance them to an envied Greatness, entrust them with real Power, and engage all the interested Passions of the most interested Minds, in Opposition to the Progress of Truth, and Reformation——Many, therefore, are their actual Dependents, and, of Course, must be their Slaves: some are dazzled with their Pomp, some with their Titles, and the Vulgar of all Sorts by mere Habit; in which Reason and Reflection never had, or will have any Concern.

D

But

But the more Obstacles are to be removed, the more necessary is the Labour; and the more Discouragements we are like to meet with, the more we ought to exert ourselves to surmount them: If the pure and simple Love of Truth and Virtue is not sufficient to inspire us, let Indignation, let Self-defence prevail with us in their Stead: Let us remember that all our Adversaries have gain'd, we have lost; and that, by the same Spirit which has engross'd so much Wealth and Power already, they would, if possible, monopolise the rest.

But this we hasten to make appear by a Series of undeniable Facts, drawn from the greatest Authorities; and in the mean time, Gentlemen, as that Truth which is their Pretence for lording it over their Brethren, is here pursu'd for its own sake, let it be listened to with Attention, with Temper, with Charity: Let it find an open Ear, a candid Mind, an ingenuous Heart!

If it carries with it the Evidence of it's own Divinity, let us pay it the Reverence it deserves; and not only by an inward Conviction, but an open Declaration of it's Force and Efficacy: With the *Persian* Courtiers, let us have the Honesty, and Courage, to acknowledge *Great is the Truth, and Mighty above all Things!* Nor barely acknowledge, but improve the Discovery for the general Good; agreeable to the glorious Example of him whose powerful Eloquence extorted this signal Evidence in it's Favour——When the generous Monarch called upon him to ask *What he would more than was appointed in the Writing;* with a Magnanimity worthy the illustrious Sentiments he had delivered. *Remember,* says he, *the Vow, which thou hast vow'd to build Jerusalem, in the Day when thou camest to thy Kingdom——* Far from centring the Effects of the royal Liberality in himself, according to the selfish Politics of our Times, he employ'd this lucky Crisis to the Service of his Country: And this, Gentle-

men, according to our different Stations and Capacities should be the grand Duty of us all; the ultimate End of our Studies, the constant Bent of our Wishes, and the regular Tenour of our Actions— Truth in Speculation is the Honour of the Schools; but 'tis the Application of it in our Lives and Conduct, that can only constitute true Patriotism, and the Sum of every social Virtue.

— Permit me to add, that as the Privileges of Thinking, Speaking, and Writing freely are peculiar to *Britain*, it ought likewise to be our peculiar Duty, and Glory to exert them to the utmost, while we have yet Time, and Opportunity for the noble Experiment. However confident we may be, that, under a *Whiggish* Establishment, 'tis impossible they should be in any Danger; with whatever Zeal we should resent the least Steps that might be taken to deprive us of them; and whatever Vengeance might fall on the rash Undertakers, 'tis the wisest Course

to place them, if possible, above Fortune's Reach; or, in the Words of the Ancient not to *defer that till to-morrow, which may be done to-day.*

I am very sensible, Gentlemen, my Introduction grows long; but, as 'tis necessary to clear the Way as we go, I hope your Goodness will indulge me to premise yet farther, that one of the principal Views of the *Christian* Religion was to abolish Priest-craft; That the Founder of it left no Model of Church-Government, and that he neither assumed himself any temporal Power, or bestow'd any on his Ministers; That he absolutely renounc'd Riches, and expressly enjoin'd his Followers to do the same; That the Word Church belongs to all Believers alike; That those who usurp the Authority of *Apostles*, ought to bear the Credentials of the *Apostles*, or be reputed Deceivers of the People; That the ancient *Scribes* and *Pharisees* have still their Representatives; and, in one Word, that Corruptions and

Inno-

Innovations have in most Parts of *Cbri-*
stendom, left no Trace of Christianity but
 the Name.

This is a bold Charge, Gentlemen,
 but not more than we shall be able to
 make good: In Order to which I shall en-
 deavour to prove, by a clear Deduction of
 Facts, That, *for Want of thinking for*
themselves, the People have, in all Ages,
been misled most fatally by those they
trusted the most: And, as Religion, in
 some Persons Hands, has been made a
 Tool to impose the cruelest Oppressions,
 and inflict the direst Calamities, I shall be-
 gin with that Branch of my Enquiry
 first—

To chuse, therefore, the most experi-
 enced Guide in this perplex'd, and irregu-
 lar Path, we may be proud to follow
 the Foot-Steps of the learned, wise and
 incorrupt Father *Paul*; a Church-man
 who was justly ashamed of the Imposi-
 tions, and Frauds of the Church; and
 who,

who, for the Sake of his Country, exposed them so effectually and severely, that he had like to have dy'd a Martyr to his own Honesty, and the unrelenting Malice of his Brethren——No Wonder indeed, they were so fiercely exasperated against him; since, in his very Introduction, he gravely reminds us, that *Judas the Betrayer*, was the first Champion for the Possessions of the Church, according to St. *John*. *Why was not this Ointment sold for three hundred Pence, and given to the Poor?* This he said, not that he cared for the Poor, but because he was a Thief, and had the Bag, and bare what was put therein. From whence we may very reasonably conclude, the reverend Father would insinuate, that if the Prelates had in Fact any uninterrupted Succession to boast of, 'twas from *Judas* only; *Seeing the Church*, says he, *from its Infancy, and in all Ages, has been subject to the same Imperfections.*

Can

Can any thing then, Gentlemen, be more reasonable, natural, or convincing than to collect a general Epitome of Church-Politics; and, *when the Tree is known by its Fruits*, to examine how and by what Means it spread so largely as to encumber the whole Soil? There being nothing in History more astonishing, than that a Set of Men, preaching the Doctrines of Self-Denial, Resignation, and a total Contempt of all worldly Interest, should be able so far to impose on Mankind, as to make those very Doctrines the Snares for amassing together all that they so expressly disclaimed.

In this Re-search, Gentlemen, no doubt some odd Discoveries will be made; and those, who are bigotted to Names, and Forms, will smart by Sympathy, when they see their Leaders under the Lash they so notoriously deserve: The Pain they suffer will naturally provoke their Anger, and that as naturally urge an Endeavour to be revenged: But,
before

before they give Vent to their usual Clamours and Reproaches, or strive to interest Heaven and Earth to be the Instruments of their Rancour and Cruelty, let them, for once, assume the Guise of Moderation and Charity; and modestly ask their own Consciences, if what is advanc'd is true: if the ecclesiastic Spirit is plainest to be discovered in Precept, or Practice; if 'tis agreeable to right Reason, to give up the Use of Reason; if 'tis for the Honour of Revelation, to be an Enemy to Truth; or if 'tis for their own Credit, or Interest, to take a Pride in wearing the Priests Fetters themselves, and then assist in compelling others to do the same.

This, I say, Gentlemen, is the Duty of all who call themselves *Christians*; and as a farther Motive to induce their Compliance with it, I think it proper to premise yet farther, that I shall, through my whole Enquiry, take it for granted, that the *Messiah's* own Institutes are the only in-

E

fallible

fallible Standard to judge of the Manners and Conduct of those who call themselves his Successors. That those Institutes are in the main so clearly and explicitly laid down, that they need no Supplement. Of course, that even the Authority of the *Apostles* themselves is to be given up, where it interferes ever so minutely with his: That therefore every Step, which was taken by the Church, to deviate from the Plainness and Simplicity of the Gospel, was a Step toward Heresy and Antichristianism; was an Affront to the Common-Sense of Mankind, and was a more effectual Encouragement of Scepticism and Infidelity, than the Writings or Discourses of all the Deists that ever yet had Being.

My Kingdom is not of this World! Take no Thought for the morrow! Sell that ye have and give Alms! Lay not up to yourselves Treasures on Earth! Provide for yourselves neither Gold, nor Silver! Call no Man Master! are plain, and express Commands;

Commands; which 'tis a Violence to Truth, to fritter away in far-fetched Comments and unwarrantable Refinements, that are evidently calculated for no other End, but to keep pamper'd Prelacy in Countenance, while it preaches a crucified *Jesus*, and, at the same Time, rolls in all the Pride, Vanity and Luxury of that very World, the same *Jesus* commanded his Apostles to renounce, if they would be thought his Disciples.

Hence, Gentlemen, 'tis plain, *That the Labourer's being worthy of his Hire*, and all those Scraps, and Fragments, quoted from the Epistles, are of no Weight compar'd with these emphatical Injunctions, which are made the most essential Characteristics of a Minister of the Gospel—

'Tis true, we read, that after the Ascension, *as many as were Possessors of Lands, or Houses sold them, and brought the Prices of the Things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles*

Feet——But 'tis evident this was in the Presumption, that the World was very near its Dissolution, as seems to be foretold in Matthew. Immediately after the Tribulation of those Days, shall the Sun be darkned, and the Moon shall not give her Light, and the Stars shall fall from Heaven, and the Powers of the Heaven shall be shaken : And then shall appear the Sign of the Son of Man in Heaven : And then shall all the Tribes of the Earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the Clouds of Heaven with Power and great Glory. And he shall send his Angels with a great Sound of a Trumpet, and they shall gather together his Elect, from the four Winds, from one End of Heaven to the other. Verily, I say unto you, this Generation shall not pass till all these Things are fulfilled. Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away. As, therefore, the Elect were in continual Expectation of this surprising Event, 'tis no wonder they were so liberal of what they thought would soon be

be of so little Value: Besides these very Donations were not laid at the *Apostles* Feet, to be appropriated to their own peculiar Use, or to be entail'd on their Successors; *but to be distributed to every Man according to his Need*; which we shall find, was the Rule for disposing of all the Collections, that were afterwards made among the Converts, in the primitive-Church. To which may be added, that this Humour of reducing all Property into one common Stock, never was followed any where but in *Jerusalem*; and became even there disused, as soon as they found the World was not so near its Period, as they at first fondly imagined.—Nay, while it lasted, *Deacons* were appointed to manage the temporal Concerns of the Church; as a manifest Proof of the Inconsistency of preaching the Gospel, and being encumbered with the common Cares, and Pursuits of Life: *We, say the Apostles, will give our selves continually to Prayer, and to the Ministry of the Word.*

The

The Custom of gathering Alms among the Rich, for the Relief of the Poor, continued notwithstanding; and, as this was earnestly and zealously enforced by the second-Rate-Saints of those Times, what was first a Free-Will-offering, became presently understood as an indispensable Duty: And we shall presently see, that on this narrow Base of Beneficence and Charity, Workmen have been found so skillful, as to erect the present magnificent Pile of ecclesiastic Power, Wealth, and Greatness.

As *Rome*, in those Days, abounded most in Riches, there the largest Sums were collected; and, as they soon either exceeded the Wants of the indigent Brethren, or, what is more probable, corrupted the Honesty of those worthy Gentlemen, who were entrusted with the Distribution, what circulated so freely from the Members, stagnated at the Heart: or, in other Words, the Church, like *Bri-*

areus,

areus, had an hundred Hands, all wide-open to receive ; but not one to bestow : as soon as the Gift was deposited, a sudden Convulsion seiz'd every Joint, and neither Prayers, nor Force itself, could ever procure the smallest Restitution——

The Proverb, that *Charity begins at Home*, was, no Doubt, owing to the Bishops of those Times, who presently thought it the wisest Way to provide for themselves first ; and, to save the Trouble of different Accounts, made but one Article of the whole.

Hence Poverty and the Poor being totally excluded together, Ways and Means were explored of enjoying the Goods at Ease, they had acquired so easily : In order to which the venerable Fathers connived at the Spoils among one another, and, from living open and in common (a Method which would ill suit with Luxury and Riot) retired every one with his Share from the saucy and inquisitive

fitive Observation of the Vulgar: Nay, some of these holy Men, willing to fulfil the very Letter of the Gospel, put out their Talents to Use, and, like a certain modern Dignitary, put up the Tables of Interest, instead of those of *Moses*-----

Scandals of this flagrant Nature, soon spread among the Heathens, and were held, even by them, so opposite to the Doctrines of *Jesus*, that a certain Officer, sent, by the Emperor *Decius*, to seize on the Riches of Churches, is represented by *Prudentius* thus speaking to St. *Laurence*, *Give to Cæsar what thou knowest to be his! I ask what is just: for if I mistake not, thy God coins no Money*-----In short St. *Cyprian* himself calls the great Persecution under the same *Decius*, but a just Judgment to purge the Corruptions of the Church, and bring on a Reformation, already so flagrantly necessary----This seasonable Severity, 'tis probable, had, for a while, it's desired Success: but, as 'twas not the Result of Choice, but compell'd by Calamity, as

soon as the Cause ceased; the Effect did the same ——— However, even these stormy Days were not without their Use: Fellow-suffering is a sensible Spur to Compassion; and Pity, as well as Devotion, now pleaded in the Church's Favour: Hence Zeal, like the Phoenix, rose out of her Ashes fresher then before: The Altar was crowded with Offerings, and Godliness became greater *Gain* than ever.

For this Reason, perhaps, it was that a Law was made by *Dioclesian* and *Maximian*, to hinder any College, Society, or Corporation, from possessing any real Estates in Land, either by Will, Gift, Purchase, or otherwise: as wisely foreseeing, that, if such a Door was left open to the Avarice, and Greediness of Ecclesiastics on one side, and the Superstition and Bigotry of the Laity on the other, Property might be brought to change Hands, and the People depend on the Benevolence of the Priests, instead of the Priests subsisting on the Cha-

rity of the People. So early was a Statute of *Mortmain* thought necessary to keep off the Encroachments of the Church, and so happy had it been for the World, if so wholesome a Statute, at least with some Exceptions, had remain'd in Force to this very Day——But *Constantine* and *Licinius*, either from Policy or Superstition, broke thro' this important Barrier, and not only establish'd an Act of Toleration in Favour of Christianity, but authorized the Churches to acquire fix'd Revenues, or immoveable Estates: From which fatal Period, we must date the Power and Grandeur of the *Christian Priests*, which have since been the Source of such incredible Mischiefs thorough the whole *Christian World*.

But this remarkable Era of the Church History we must reserve to treat of more at large in our future Discourses.

The Consequences, Gentlemen, that instantly followed this pernicious Indulgence,

gence, were so extraordinary, and, if represented truly, must be expressed in such severe Terms, that I shall rather chuse the very Words of Father *Paul* on this Occasion, than trust myself to the Censures of those, who will fancy themselves libell'd in the History of their Predecessors tho' of so many Hundred Years standing.

' The same exceeding Devotion in
' Princes and People, says he, which produced the vast Increase of Wealth to the Church, grew, at last, to excite an extreme Thirst in her Ministers to improve it; from which even those of the clearest Intentions among them were not wholly exempt.

' For, since the Distribution of these Goods, turn'd to the Glory of God, and the public Good, they concluded the more the Church had to bestow, the more those Ends would be answered. Thus, in the View to so great a Merit, they set themselves with all their Skill and Industry about so plea-

' sing a Task, without confining themselves
 ' to the Lawfulness, or Justice of the Me-
 ' thods : But if the Church were enrich'd,
 ' by whatsoever Means, they thought they
 ' made a pleasing Sacrifice to God.

' And certainly, from these indiscreet
 ' Zealots and for want of a due Mixture
 ' of Discretion, have flow'd innumerable
 ' and incurable Mischiefs : For they,
 ' imagining every Thing justifiable that
 ' is done with a View to Religion, by
 ' acting both against that, and even of
 ' Humanity itself, have often set the
 ' World in dreadful Combustions.

' Thus it happened, when first the
 ' Church was allowed to acquire real
 ' Estates, some Religious Persons, enter-
 ' taining an Opinion, that it was a Ser-
 ' vice to God to disinherit the Children
 ' and Heirs of Families, in order to give
 ' their Estates to the Church, omitted no
 ' Artifice to persuade Widows, Maids, and
 ' other easy People, ready to receive any
 ' Im-

Impressions, to deprive their own Families and make the Church their Heirs.

And this Distemper grew to such a Height, that the Prince was obliged to provide against it, by an Ordinance made in the Year 370, which, in Truth, did not put the Churches absolutely into an Incapacity of increasing their Estates, but *forbad Churchmen only to frequent the Houses of Widows and Orphans, or to receive any Gifts by Will, or Donation from Women immediately, or by any third Hand.*

Which Ordinance, St. Jerom. acknowledges to have been a good Step towards the Remedy of a Corruption, which had taken too deep a Root among the Clergy; namely, an immoderate craving after temporal Riches.

Yet this was not found sufficient without another Ordinance, made a few Years after, *that Widows, who devoted*

' voted themselves to the Church, should
 ' neither give, or leave by Will any im-
 ' moveable, or real Estates, or Moveables
 ' of great Value,

Nor were these excessive Acquisitions
 ' pleasing to St. *Augustine*, who lived in
 ' those Times, and declared himself free-
 ' ly on that Head, *That he thought it*
 ' *more reasonable, that Inheritances should*
 ' *be left to the next of Kin, than to the*
 ' *Church*——Yet neither the excellent
 ' Exhortations of the Fathers, nor the
 ' Laws of Princes, were of Force to set
 ' any Bounds to the growing Wealth of
 ' the Church, but that it exceeded all
 ' Measure.

This, Gentlemen, is the Language of
 the most upright Father *Paul*, and these
 were the Openings, which the Clergy gave
 to the Satire of their Enemies, and the
 Blushes of their Friends, even in those
 early Ages of *Christianity*. It must be
 own'd, however, that, in the *Eastern*
 Provinces

Provinces of the Empire, they behaved yet with some Modesty; and, tho' they laboured indefatigably to increase their Revenues, affected still to employ them for the Honour of God, and the Support of the Poor: But, in those of the *West*, even the very Masque of Charity and Piety, was thrown aside, and the Bishops rapaciously seiz'd on all; nay, all seem'd to little for their Avarice and Luxury; while the Churches fell to Ruin for Want of Repairs and the Poor perished for Want of Bread.

These Abuses, at last, called so loudly for Redress, that it was ordain'd the Revenues of a Bishopric should be divided into four Parts; one for the Bishop, one for the inferior Clergy, one for the Fabric of the Church, and the last for the Poor: So short was this new Regulation of the original Practice of the Church; when the Poor were primarily considered, because all Devotions were given for their Sakes: But, in process of
Time,

Time, even this Ordinance, imperfect as it was, grew obsolete, and the Lot of the Clergy, like the Rod of *Aaron*, voraciously swallowed up the Rest.

During this whole Interval, however, it must be observed that all Deacons, Priests, and even Bishops themselves, were elected by the People; and, tho' none of these were permitted to officiate till consecrated in Form, by their Brethren; yet, on the Authority of St. *Leo*, one of the *Roman Pontiffs*, 'tis evident, no Ordination was decreed valid, without their Concurrence and Approbation. *A Thing*, says Father PAUL, *which may be justly recommended to the Observation of this Age: when we are taught that Elections, wherein the People should pretend to have any Share, would be unlawful and invalid. So changed, and so inverted are Customs, as to make Good and Evil change their Names; calling that lawful, which was formerly, reputed detestable and impious:*

and that unjust, which had then the Reputation of Sanctity.

Benefices, Gentlemen, now becoming Possessions of real Value, and Bishoprics being loaded with Temporalities, which carried along with them all that the Pride, or Sensuality of Man could covet, the Clergy no longer declined the pastoral Office out of a modest Diffidence of their own Abilities to discharge it as they ought; but openly declar'd themselves Candidates; importunately solicited the Votes of the Electors; and left no Artifice untry'd to carry their Point: By which Means, Faction and Intrigue really effected what was impiously ascrib'd to the *Holy-Ghost*; and Seditions, Murthers, and all Manner of Crimes not only attended these tumultuous Proceedings, but were frequently perpetrated even at the *Instigation of the contending Parties*——This did not fail to open the Eyes of the civil Magistrate, who instantly discovered the Necessity of

G

depriving

depriving the People of this dangerous Privilege : as likewise of rendring these ambitious and turbulent Spirits dependent on a Court for their Interest and Preferment. Accordingly, from thence forward, the Sovereigns assum'd a Right to nominate, or confirm every Ecclesiastic in his Benefice ; and by this means had both an Opportunity to awe and oblige the Clergy ; as well as make use of their Power and Authority to add a Weight and Sanction to their own——So long ago was this refined Secret brought into play ; and so susceptible were the reverend Brotherhood of any Impression that did not actually interfere with their own Dominion over the deluded People !——

You are farther to observe, Gentlemen, that, immediately on this Alteration in the Road to Church-Preferment, the pious Candidates likewise altered, immediately, their Method of travelling to it——Princes being now the grand Patrons of all the Livings in their Jurisdictions,

tions, their Courts swarmed with Suitors of all Ranks and Degrees; who utterly neglected their present Cures, and stoop'd to all that was vile and base, in Pursuit of better.—*Translations* and *Commendams* getting Ground under the most plausible Pretences, 'till one Church and Bishopric was made use of only as a Thorough-Fare to another; and a whole Pile of Pluralities, heap'd upon one another with indefatigable Labour, by busy, bustling Prelates, served only as so many spiritual Cushions, to support them in Ease, Indolence, and Luxury ever after.

Much about this Crisis too, partly by Misfortune and partly by Way of Relief, as 'tis to be presumed, of those who had undertaken more Business than they car'd to go thro' with, Supernumerary Ecclesiastics took Place; a Set of volunteer-Devotees, who, tho' they had yet no Call, were willing to hold themselves in readiness; that, in Case a sudden Mortality should happen at the Altar, it

might not be in the Power of *Satan* to surprize the Out-Works unprovided—— Out of these the reverend Dignitaries chose their Deputies, to whom they assigned a small Pittance for their Support ; so small, indeed, that it was scarce a Shadow of the mighty Substance they enjoyed themselves, as a Consideration for that very Labour which they undervalu'd so much in others. Notwithstanding which, there were yet greater Numbers of Candidates for these wretched Curacies, than there were Cures to supply them with : The Church was possessed of so many Immunities and had so ample a Field of Plenty, Power and Dignity to range in at Pleasure, that 'tis no Wonder the Words of the Gospel were reversed ; and the Vintage, however fruitful, could not make Room for such a Glut of Labourers——Beside, many of their spiritual Lordships made no Conscience of living at Discretion upon their Diocese, or rather devouring it whole : By which Means, Multitudes of their Brethren

Brethren were again reduced to their primitive Institution ; that it is to say, to live on the Alms of their Fellow-Christians ; and, instead of feeding the Flock of *Christ*, were, literally speaking, fed by them : Hence some that had not Brains to provide for themselves, nor had the good Fortune to light on those who had Bowels to provide for them, raised a terrible Outcry for their daily Bread : But their Superiours were too wise to hear a Grievance, they resolved, before-hand, not to redress ; and too tenacious to part with any Convenience of their own in Compassion to the Wants of another — The poor Laity, therefore, were sure to be saddled with the whole Load : And what should be the next Expedient truly but Tythes ? Tythes were granted to the Tribe of *Levi* in the old Testament, instead of a Portion in Land, and, therefore, they were to be confirmed to the *Christian Levites*, by the New ; Tythes ! Tythes ! was immediately the Cry from *Dan* to *Berſhebah* ; and so far was this ridiculous Claim

Claim carried, that, says Father Paul, all Christian Perfection was placed in that one Merit of paying Tythes; and, not contented with predial Tythes, they began to claim personal also: that is to say, the Tythe of every Man's Trade, and Industry, not excepting even that of Hunting, Soldier's Pay, or the infamous Gains of common Prostitutes.

—But of this important Incident, I shall treat more at large in my next—
At present, Gentlemen, I shall conclude with observing in the general, that the old Revenues of the Church, were so notoriously perverted from their original Institution, such a Spirit of Rapine prevailed among the Clergy, such manifest Forgeries, Prevarications, and down-right Falshoods, were trump'd up to give a Sanction to their oppressive Claims; and Corruption of all Sorts broke in so like a Torrent, almost to the utter Ruin of Learning, Piety, and Virtue, that the Emperor Charles the great, thought it incumbent

incumbent on him, tho' a Lay-man, and an Orthodox-Believer, to interpose his Authority for their Preservation.—Accordingly, he obliged the Bishops to disgorge some Part of their ill-got Possessions, in Favour of the inferior Clergy; restor'd to the Cities the Elections of their Pastors and Bishops; in particular, that of the Pope to the People of *Rome*, reserving to himself only the Right of Confirmation; and, by many other useful Regulations beside, set Bounds, for a while, to the insatiable Appetite of the Church, which had, for such Numbers of Years, been encroaching on the Rights of Mankind, without Check or Controul; to the infinite Scandal and Disgrace of the *Christian* Name.

————How this seasonable Barrier came to be again broke thro'; how the Church, which had been dispossessed of such a Legion of evil Spirits, came to be in a worse Condition than before; in what Temper, and with what
Views

Views its Missionaires converted the *Western Kings*; and what a valuable Merchandize they made of the misrepresented Doctrines of *Jesus*, shall be the Business of our ensuing Discourses—That the Eyes of blinded Zeal may be opened; that shackled Prejudice may give Way to free Enquiry; that those horrid Twins Enthusiasm, and Superstition may be supplanted by right Reason and useful Knowledge: That Imposture and Oppression may resign the Sceptre to Liberty and the undisguised Purity of the Gospel: *That Corruption may be overcome* and all the noble Spirits among us, exclaim with one Voice, *Great is the Truth, and mighty above all Things!*



F

S.

The Ax laid to the Root

O F

CHRISTIAN PRIESTCRAFT.

DISCOURSE II.

(Price One Shilling.)

Next Week will be Publish'd

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

Ufurpation of Church-Power.

*Why seek we Truths from Priests?
The Smiles of Courtiers and the Harlots Tears,
The Tradesman's Oath and Mourning of an Heir,
Are Truths to what Priests tell—
—Oh why has Priesthood Privilege to lye,
And yet to be believed?*

LEE.

The Ax laid to the Root

OF
CHRISTIAN PRIESTCRAFT.
In FOUR DISCOURSES.

By a LAYMAN.

DISCOURSE II. ON THE CRAFT of TYTHES.

*They neither plough, nor sow; and yet they reap
The Fat of all the Land and suck the Poor.*

SHAKESPEARE.

*Temples are yours, not GOD's lov'd Palaces;
Where Offerings make not his, but your own Feasts;
Where you most wisely live, because at Ease,
And entertain your Founders as your Guests:
With Ease you take what we provide with Care;
And we, who your Legation must maintain,
Find all your Tribe in the Commission are;
And none but Heav'n could send so large a Train.
But, being all Embassadors from thence,
The growing Charge will soon exceed our Rent;
Unless you please to treat at his Expence
Who sent you; not at ours, where you are sent.*

DAVENANT.

LONDON:

Printed for T. COOPER, at the Globe in Paternoster-
Row. MDCCXLII.

The Appeal to the Court

of

CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

In Four Discourses

By A. L. L. L.

DISCOURSES

ON THE

CHARACTER OF THE

43.

4.

6

52.





DISCOURSE II.

ON THE

CRAFT of TYTHES.

GENTLEMEN,

IN Proportion to the Pleasure we feel should be our Acknowledgment; and, as the Approbation these Discourses have received in the Delivery is a very high Complement to the Cause they are devoted to, it would betray a fullen Insensibility to conceal my Satisfaction.

B

But

But tho' I glory in the Success they have hitherto met with, I am far from ascribing it to any Merit of my own---- No, Gentlemen, 'tis Truth herself, Truth for her own Sake, that you have espoused Truth; simple and unadorned, neglected, despised, unfashionable, I had like to have said, persecuted Truth---- My Office has been only to introduce her; the Rest her own Eloquence has commanded, and your Candour and Ingenuity bestowed.

Think, then, if so meanly, so unworthily recommended, she has been able to excite so much Attention and enforce so much Respect, think, I say, with what Power and Efficacy, Grace and Majesty she will appear under the Umbrage of such great Names as the learned *Selden*, the incomparable *Milton*, the laborious *Mascow*, and many other eminent Personages beside, who made it
their

their highest Glory to be her Admirers and Advocates.

These, Gentlemen, will now be her Guides and Conductors ; but so as to place her in the fairest Light ; not to distinguish themselves at her Expence, much less usurp her Seat, and be deified in her stead——And this, in my humble Opinion, is making a right Use of Authorities ; not to dazzle with the Splendor of illustrious Characters, or silence, instead of convince, with unfair Comparisons (which are truly, according to the Proverb, odious) but to apply their Learning to explain Facts, their Penetration to unravel Difficulties, their Reasonings to confute Error and their Wit to adorn the Figure of Truth.

Nor, in Pursuits of this Nature, is Novelty to seduce us out of the beaten Road, into her flowery Paths and gawdy Deceptions: Truth is older than the World, and existed from all Eternity ; nor

was there ever an Age so dark, or a Nation so ignorant, but her radiant Footsteps were to be discovered.

Custom, Craft, Servility and Tyranny, indeed, have thrown an artificial Obscurity round her in all Nations and Ages more or less; nor has Revelation been, hitherto, able to put an end to so fatal an Eclipse; or even prepare the Minds of Men to bear the Light, when it has been occasionally introduced: Hence the Politic and Designing have taken Advantage of this Cowardice and Weakness of their Fellow-Creatures, and actually persuaded them to think that to shut their Eyes was the surest Method to find their Way.

Now to encounter this Absurdity is no new Task; and to induce Men to look about them will not vary the Landscape: The very same Hills, Meadows, Trees, Rivers, Skies and Sunshine were the Objects of Sight from
the

the Creation and so will continue to the End of Time.

Our great Predecessors have not left one Avenue to Knowledge unexplored; and a much abler Genius than mine would have nothing to do but endeavour, with us, to clear those already known from the Obstructions that now render them in a Manner useless; to straiten some, to enlarge others, and leave the Mind free to make it's Progress thro' each, or all, at Pleasure.

No Disgust, therefore, ought to be taken, if the Novellist is here disappointed, or that what is uttered barely corresponds with Truths already delivered, or excites only the same Images that we were long before acquainted with—
A very few Notes in Music, a very few Colours in Painting, are, in the Master's Hand, capable of infinitely various Effects: 'Tis a parallel Case with Truth and Knowledge; tho' always the same in
Features

Features and Complexion, they may be shewn in Actions and Attitudes perpetually diversified——Beside, we often forget their Figures, often mistake blundering Copies for Originals, and are often so grossly imposed upon, as to have Monsters intruded on us in their Room, which, in lieu of bearing the least Resemblance, are their Opposites in all Things. To which may be added, that the wanton Ambition of saying something new, has filled the World with verbose Schemes and inane Theories; which have served rather to amuse, than inform; and, like a Fashion at Court, having had their Reign, gave Place to new ones, and were remembered no more.

To prevent, therefore, if possible, all future Court to these Idols of the Imagination on the one Hand, or Adoration to those Demons of Falshood, and Imposition on the other, it may, and ought to be deemed an useful, and seasonable Office to collect from all the various
Sketches

Sketches of Truth and Knowledge, to be found in History, or describ'd in Philosophy, or blended with Controversy, or dawning thro' Tradition, or flashed out in private Conversation, such Features, Limbs, and Graces, as best correspond with each other, and, when set together, like the Charms of the *Græcian* Virgins by the Painter of old, would form a finished Deity, perfect in Proportion, similar in Parts, and irresistably lovely in the whole.

This, this, Gentlemen, is our great Attempt——But, alas! how hard to be accomplished?——Bear with us then if, through human Frailty, we sometimes languish in the Pursuit; and rather employ your Knowledge and Sagacity to assist than condemn us.

Such a Design as this is not to be looked upon as a mere Struggle with any set of obnoxious Men whatever, or a Snare for popular Applause; but a

grave and sober Attempt to find out a Criterion to be the Test of Good and Evil, Truth and Falshood, Virtue and Vice, Liberty and Oppression — Of Course every Man that would be free, honest, wise, or happy has an intimate Concern in it's Success, and, is, therefore, under a moral Obligation to contribute all that is in his Power for it's Service.

We are again to remind you, Gentlemen, (the Nature of these Discourses, requiring such References frequently) that all Institutes of *Christianity* must be brought to the Test of the Gospel to try if they are Standard; that whatever Part of each has not an explicate Authority there, is but an Engine of Torture, like that of *Procrustes*, to lop or stretch the Conscience to what Size the Magistrate pleases; and that all the Precepts of the *Messiah*, which regard Man as an Individual, or the whole Body of Believers as a Church, are intelligible

telligible to the meanest Capacity : agreeable to the following Sentiment of the divine *Milton*.

' 'Tis true there be some Books, and
 ' especially some Places in those Books,
 ' that remain clouded ; yet that which
 ' is most necessary to be known is most
 ' easy ; and that which is difficult, so
 ' far expounds itself ever, as to tell us
 ' how little it imports our saving Know-
 ' ledge. Hence to infer a general Ob-
 ' scurity over all the Text, is a mere
 ' Suggestion of the Devil, to dissuade
 ' Men from reading it, and casts an
 ' Aspersiion of Dishonour both upon the
 ' Mercy, Truth and Wisdom of God.
 ' We count it no Genteelness, or fair
 ' Dealing in a Man of Power amongst
 ' us, to require strict and punctual Obe-
 ' dience, and yet give out all his Com-
 ' mands ambiguous and obscure ; we should
 ' think he had a Plot upon us : Certain-
 ' ly such Commands were no Commands
 ' but Snares. The very Essence of
 C Truth

' Truth is Plainness and Brightness ; the
 ' Darkness and Crookedness are our own,
 ' The Wisdom of God created Under-
 ' standing fit and proportionable to
 ' Truth, the Object and End of it, as
 ' the Eye to the thing visible. If our
 ' Understanding has a Film of Ignorance
 ' over it, or we blear with gazing on
 ' other false Glistering, what is that to
 ' Truth? If we will but purge with
 ' Sovereign-Eye-Salve that intellectual
 ' Ray, which God hath planted in us,
 ' then we would believe the Scriptures,
 ' protesting their own Plainness and Per-
 ' spicuity; calling to them, to be instruct-
 ' ed, not only the Wise and Learned,
 ' but the Simple, the Poor, the Babes,
 ' &c.——And in another Place——
 ' They fear the plain Field of the Scrip-
 ' tures; the Chase is too hot ; they seek
 ' the dark, the bushey, the tangled
 ' Forest ; they would imbosk : they feel
 ' themselves strook in the transparent
 ' Streams of divine Truth, they would
 ' plunge and tumble and think to lie
 ' hid

' hid in the foul Weeds and muddy
 ' Waters, where no Plummet can reach
 ' the Bottom——But let them beat
 ' themselves like Whales, and spend
 ' their Oil, 'till they be dragg'd ashore !
 ' Tho' wherefore should the Ministers
 ' give them so much Line for Shifts, and
 ' Delays ? Wherefore should they not
 ' urge only the Gospel ; and hold it even
 ' in their Faces, like a Mirror of Dia-
 ' mond, 'till it dazzle and pierce their
 ' misty Eye-Balls, maintaining the Honour
 ' of its absolute Sufficiency, and Supre-
 ' macy inviolable ?

Thus far this illustrious Light of Truth,
 and Liberty——And from hence, Gen-
 tlemen, it immediately follows, that if
 these Books, thus obviously-easy to be
 understood, are really the reveal'd Will
 of Heaven, no earthly Power, or Au-
 thority can frame the least Supplement
 to them, especially in manifest Contra-
 diction to the whole Scope and Tenour
 of its Doctrines, without incurring the

highest Guilt, without being answerable for those they mislead, and those they punish—

—On the other Hand, if those Books are not the revealed Will of Heaven (which we are not permitted to imagine) then the Power of the Magistrate must be limited by the Weal of the People: For, as there can be no Plea for any religious Establishment whatever, either feign'd or true, but the Benefit of Mankind, that Scheme which is only an Artifice to oppress, or delude the Public, by all the Rules of Equity and all the natural Rights of free-born Subjects, cannot be expos'd, or cancell'd too soon.

In short, Gentlemen, God would not enjoin any Laws that should enslave his Creatures; and Man ought not either to father such Oppressions on the most High, or presume to make that awful Name a Rod of Iron to tyrannize over his Equals—

In

In opposing, therefore, this infamous and destructive Craft, we vindicate the Goodness, Justice, Wisdom and Majesty of Heaven, profan'd by the worst of Men to the worst of Purposes. We tread in the most certain Foot-steps of the blessed *Messiah*, who never declaims with more Zeal than against Priests and Hypocrites: and make use of his *Call to Liberty*, as he designed we should, by effecting our own Deliverance.

To proceed, therefore, in the same Method we began, I shall continue to track the boasted Successors of the Apostles thro' all the Bye-Ways of Pride, Avarice; Fraud and Oppression that led to Riches; Power and Grandeur; Every one of which will appear a palpable Deviation from the very Letter, as well as the Spirit of the Gospel: In so much, that if we ourselves do not keep it constantly in our Eye, we shall absolutely forget it had

had ever any Relation to them, or they to it.

So easily may the best Institutions be corrupted, nay so totally perverted, as to become the very Tools of effecting worse Mischiefs than those they were calculated to remove! Mischiefs that never could have had a Being, if the Conduct of the Church had been annually examined and compared with the recorded Will of its adorable Founder; according to the excellent Advice of *St. Cyprian*.

‘ The Succession of Truth, says he,
 ‘ may fail; to renew which we must
 ‘ have Recourse to the Fountains: If a
 ‘ Channel, or Conduit - Pipe, which
 ‘ brought in Water plentifully before,
 ‘ suddenly fail, do we not go to the
 ‘ Fountain to know the Cause; whether
 ‘ the Spring affords no more, or whether
 ‘ the Vein be stopt, or turn’d aside in the
 ‘ mid Course? Thus ought we to do, in
 ‘ keeping God’s Precepts; that if in
 , aught

' aught the Truth be changed, we may
 ' repair to the *Gospel*, and to the Apostles,
 ' that thence may arise the Reason of
 ' our Doings, from whence our Order,
 ' and Beginning arose.'

A Thought of the same Nature occurs
 in *Machiavel*; as likewise in the learned
 Poems of *Greville*, Lord *Brooke*, who
 flourish'd in the Reign of Q. *Elizabeth*,
 which being of as much Weight in
 Politics as the other in Religion, it can
 never be unseasonable to recommend
 it to your very serious Consideration,

*Once in an Age let Government then trace
 The Course of its Traditions to their Birth,
 And bring them back unto their Infant-Days,
 To keep her own Sovereignty on Earth.
 Else Viper-like, their Parents they devour;
 For all Power's Children easily covet Power.*

Yes, Gentlemen, had these wholesome
 Lessons been observed, neither Refor-
 mations, or Revolutions had been neces-
 sary—But as it is—Let us proceed with
 the immediate Business of the Day!—

In

— In my former Discourse, I hinted to you that, both in Scripture and the Writings of the primitive Christians, the Word Church was not confined to the Clergy, or a Place of Worship, but was either apply'd to the whole Body of Believers, however scatter'd, or disjoin'd, or to any particular Assembly, residing in any particular District; the former, by Way of Eminence, being call'd the Church; and the latter distinguish'd by the Name of the Province, or City where it was first established: That the first Sums of Money, collected among Christians, were for the Relief of the Poor, particularly the new Converts; subordinate to these only, the Ministry putting in for a Share: That, as the Number of Christians encreased, preaching became a Trade; and a particular Junto of Men not only engrossed the Dispensation of the Gospel to themselves, but the Profits of it too: The Altar being now encumber'd with Riches, but the Poor intirely forgot; the

Clergy

Clergy increasing their Demands, as they increased in Numbers ; and Numbers crouding in, not only to be free from those Demands themselves, but share in the Luxury fed from the Wants of others : The Fathers of the Church, as *Milton* strongly expresses it, *revelling like BEL-SHAZZAR, with their full Carouses in Goblets and Vessels of Gold, snatch'd from GOD's Temple ;* rapaciously struggling with each other for the largest Portion of the Spoil ; and calling upon the People out of the Scripture to give, give, give their very Blood ; if nothing else was left to make good their own Depredations on their starving Brethren.

This was the State of the Church, Gentlemen, when Tythes were first demanded, about four hundred Years after CHRIST : For, as the laborious *Mr. Selden* has sufficiently proved, none of these sacred Harpies had the Assurance to make such a Demand before——And what was the Plea then ? Why, truly,

D

no

no less than an original Writing under God's own Hand, investing them and their spiritual Heirs, with a Tenth of the whole World, till that and their Title-Deeds should be burnt together.

In a Word, Gentlemen, would you think it possible? The Grant of *Moses* to the Tribe of *Levi*, of Tythes instead of a Land-Portion in the Deodand of *Canaan* (tho' his whole Ritual beside, had been so long, and so effectually exploded) was the Foundation on which they build this stupendous Claim : modestly connecting with their spiritual Authority, derived from their Successorship to the Apostles, the temporal Inheritances of *Aaron* and his Brethren; tho', at the Time of their Institution, not the least Hint is given of any new Establishment, in Case the first should fail ; or that any Transfer should be made of the peculiar Rights of the *Jewish* Priesthood, to enrich any other with their valuable Spoils.

But

But say no positive Conclusion can be drawn from the Silence of the *Old Testament* on that Head, surely, if the Followers of the MESSIAH were still to be loaded with the same insupportable Yoke, there was a moral Necessity that it should be explicitly enjoined in the *New*; whereas, in the Current of these Discourses, the contrary has and will be made demonstrably manifest ; and nothing but the grossest Ignorance on one Hand and the most notorious Fraud on the other, could have ever given Place to so flagrant an Imposition. For, not to weary you with a Repetition of the same disinterested Gospel-Precepts, referred to already, as JESUS declares his *Kingdom was not of this World*, so Paul, in particular, piques himself on acting, as near as possible, up to his divine Example ; saying to the *Corinthians*, according to a late new Translation. *I approve myself as the Minister of GOD, by my great Constancy in Afflictions, in Torment, in*

Distresses, from Stripes, from Imprisonments, from Tumults, from Labours, from Watchings, from Penury. I approve myself by Charity, by Knowledge, by Meakness, by Kindness, by Sanctity of Mind, by undisguis'd Benevolence, by the preaching of the Truth, by the Power of GOD, by the Arms of Justice, offensive and defensive, in Honour, and in Disgrace, under Infamy, and in Repute; look'd upon as an Impostor, while I say what is true; as unknown, and yet celebrated; as dying, and yet I am alive; as chastised, but not slain; as sorrowful, tho' always chearful; as poor, tho' enriching many; as having nothing, yet contented with every Thing. And in another very remarkable Passage. And as I have, so I shall always keep myself from being burthensome to you. I solemnly protest no man shall binder me of this Applause in the Regions of ACHAIA. Why so? Is it because I love you not? For otherwise GOD knows. But this I do, and shall do, to make those drop their Hire, who are so bent

bent upon Hire : and, then indeed, they will be as they pretend to be, like me. For these are false Apostles, deceitful Workmen, disguised so as to pass for true Apostles. And no Wonder ; for SATAN himself may put on the Appearance of an Angel of Light : Therefore, it is not strange if his Agents are so disguised as to appear like Ministers of the Gospel : But their End shall be answerable to their Actions. Again, addressing himself to the same People, in express Words, for their Liberality in Favour of the Converts of Jerusalem, he uses these Terms. *I don't mean to prescribe to you, but that the Zeal of others may show you are as sincerely well affected.* Or as the Old Translation has it, *I speak not by Commandment, but by Occasion of the Forwardness of others, and to prove the Sincerity of your Love.*

Observe, Gentlemen, I beseech you, how utterly impossible it is for a Christian-Priesthood to countenance their greedy

dy Challenges of Wealth, Pomp and Luxury, either by the Doctrines or Facts contained in the Gospel : St. *Paul* himself, when collecting Charities for the necessitous Brethren, not presuming to command, but intreat ; and as soliciting a Benevolence, not exacting a Duty.

But let us descend a little deeper into this iniquitous Affair ; let us examine where the Stress of their Claim of Tythes was urged most, and by what a Series of Frauds and Impostures they were able at last, to accomplish so mighty a Project to aggrandize themselves and enslave us.

In the first Place, therefore, it appears that these reverend Craftsmen, foreseeing the *Mosaic* Provision of Tythes for the Support of the Tribe of *Levi*, would prove but a slender Authority in their Favour, resolved to connect the Interest of those who were to pay this holy Tribute, or rather the Shadow of it, with

with the Substance they themselves resolved to enjoy——That is to say, they would have it believ'd, that, in exact Proportion to a Man's Liberality to the Church, he should not only be securer of Salvation in the other World, but of Prosperity in this: Founding their mercenary Harangues on these Words of *Malachi*. *Bring ye all the Tythes into the Store-House, that there may be Bread in my House, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of Hosts, if I will not open to you the Windows of Heaven, and pour you out a Blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.* But forgetting to put their Hearers in Mind of two other Passages of the same Prophet, which are infinitely more conclusive, and more of a Piece with the severe, but just Reproaches of the MESSIAH in the Gospel. *Who is there even among you, that would shut the Doors for nought? neither do ye kindle the Fire on mine Altar for nought. I have no Pleasure in you, saith the LORD of*
I Hosts,

Hosts, neither will I accept an Offering at your Hands. Again, For the Priest's Lips should keep Knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his Mouth : For he is the Messenger of the LORD of Hosts, Therefore, have I also made you contemptible and base before all the People, according as ye have not kept my Ways, but have been partial in the Law.

Methinks, Gentlemen, it is but fair that as one of these Passages was made use of to be the Poison of Devotion, that the other should be administred as the Antidote ; and, as they boldly put in for the Appointments of the *Levitical* Priesthood, that they should be obnoxious to the bitter Censures almost inseparable from it : Neither is this the only Title they have to the Parallel, as will be very sufficiently demonstrated by the Sequel.

By

By the way however, 'tis observable, that this Serpent of Tythes appeared in the Beginning as white and harmless as a Church-warden's Wand——For, tho' the Judgments of God were made the spiritual Scare-Crow to enforce the Payment of them, the whole Process was carried on in the Name of the Poor: 'Twas for the Sake of Charity they were first demanded and first paid; scarce a Word was dropped of the Clergy; or, if there was, 'twas with great Caution, as if the Charge of their Maintenance was to employ but a small Part of the Treasures devoted to pious Uses.

'Tis observable, likewise, that the Priests as yet assumed no right to command them, and not only received those that were offered as Stewards for the Poor, but with great Acknowledgment; as is evident in a Quotation of *Selden's* from *Cassian* the Hermit; by which it appears that Tythes were first offered to

E

certain

certain holy Abbots in *Egypt* for the Succour of the Indigent; and Abbot *John* in particular is said to answer those staunch Zealots, who were most forward to begin the Custom, to this Effect. *I gladly embrace this Instance of your religious Bounty, entrusted to my Dispensation; because First-Fruits, and Tythes, faithfully offered, as Charities to the Poor, are a Sacrifice of sweet-smelling Savour to the Lord.*

This was about the Year 430, and in the Year 470 we have another Instance of the same Nature in *Pannonia*, on the Credit of *Eugippius* in the Life of St. *Severin*——But the Inhabitants of *Lauriacum*, having been long admonished to follow the same pious Example of paying Tythes to the Poor, could not be prevail'd upon to consent, till their Corn was blasted: when, very sagely concluding their Misfortune to be a Judgment for their Disobedience, they approach their Spiritual Guide in their Penitentials,

nitentials, humbly confessing their Contumacy; who subtly nicks the Opportunity, and replies, *If you punctually pay the Poor, you will not only enjoy eternal Salvation as a Reward, but abound in all the good Things of this Life into the Bargain.*

Thus it appears that Tythes, in the most favourable Light, were first set on Foot, under the Gospel-Dispensation, as a Provision for the Poor; and were offer'd freely, or might be arbitrarily withheld. But, as the venerable Father *Paul* observes, the voluntary Donations of the People were soon exacted as Dues, and the Poor as soon understood to be the Clergy only: so that the Pretence of Charity was used only to fasten the Chain, which was afterwards riveted by the Pretence of divine Right; and that Altar which was devoted to the most acceptable Sacrifices, the Relief of the wretched and miserable, became a Table of Riot, to fatten a greedy, rapacious Priesthood; According to that detestable Picture in *Samuel*

*mu*el of the Sons of *Eli*, or, as the Text more properly calls them, the Sons of *Belial*. And the Priests Custom with the People was, that when any Man offered Sacrifice, the Priest's Servant came while the Flesh was in seething with a Flesh-Hook of three Teeth in his Hand; and he struck it into the Pan, or Kettle, or Cauldron, or Pot. All that the Flesh-Hook brought up, the Priest took for himself: So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites, that came thither also: before they burnt the Fat, the Priests Servant came, and said to the Man that sacrificed, give Flesh to roast for the Priest! For he will not have sodden Flesh, but raw; and, if any Man said unto him, let them not fail to burn the Fat presently! and then take as much as thy Soul desireth! Then he would answer him, nay but thou shall give it me now; and, if not, I will take it by Force——

A very characteristical Passage truly! and finely alluded to by *Milton* in his immortal Poem; speaking of *Belial*, among the rest of the fallen Angels——

Belial

*Belial came last, than whom a Spirit more lend
Fell not from Heaven, or more gross to love
Vice for itself : To him no Temple stood,
Or Altar smok'd, yet who more oft than he
In Temples, and at Altars, when the Priest
Turns Atheist, as did Eli's Sons, who fill'd
With Lust, and Violence the House of God?*

But to proceed, Gentlemen, let us examine our reverend Adversaries own Arguments to establish this priestly Excise! Let us hear some of the Fathers themselves, and out of their own Mouths let us condemn them!—

'Tis not sufficient, says St. Ambrose, that we profess the Name of Christ, if we do not the necessary Works of Christ.

——And pray what are these necessary Works? *Why Tythes! Tythes! Tythes of all Things! For so the Lord has commanded—If any one is conscious he has not faithfully discharged the grand Duty of Tythes,*

Tythes, let him largely overpay the little he has withheld! And what is to discharge this grand Duty faithfully? Neither more, or less, than a Share of your Corn, Wine, Oil, Fruit, Cattle, Trade, &c. of all the Substance which God has given to Men, he set his Mark upon the Tenth for himself; and therefore 'tis impious to detain, what is his own peculiar Portion.

Now, Gentlemen, let us hear what is attributed to *St. Austin*. For, to do him Justice, even *Selden* makes a Doubt whether it really belongs to him or no—*By the Grace of God, most dear Brethren,* says he, *the Days of Harvest draw near, in which, by way of Thanksgiving, we should think of offering, I should say of restoring Tythes to God the Giver of all—For God who is worthily thought to give all to us, should be thought as worthy to receive a Tenth from us——Not for himself, but for us, without Doubt for our Souls Welfare——*And a little after, to clench it, adds, *If you are no Land-Holder,*

Holder, or Farmer, whatever you live by is of God, and, therefore, he expects Tythes of all by which you live.—And, returning then to first Fruits and Tythes of the Year, threatens them with Dearth, and Blasting, if they neglect the Payment of either—It being, says he, a most just Usage of God, to reduce those to a Tenth, who refuse to pay a Tenth—and afterwards with much Earnestness. Tythes are a Debt; and those who refuse to pay them, invade the Property of another and shall be answerable, at the Tribunal of the eternal Judge, for as many Poor as are starved to Death in the Place where they reside; because God has reserved the Tythe as a Provision for them——

Not for the Priests then it seems, even upon the Authority of this reverend Father——He concludes, with saying——Whoever, therefore, would either put in for a Reward, or deserve Forgiveness of his Sins, let him pay Tythes.

In

In short, as Father Paul very keenly observes, *all the Sermons of those Times, and for some Ages after, without touching on Matters of Faith, were all pointed to prove the Obligation of Tythes. Which the Necessities and Interests of the Curates, or Ministers, induced them to amplify and enforce with all their Eloquence*——Nay so far was this Vehemence of theirs carried, that *Sermonem ad Decimas vertere*, became a Proverb to signify an impertinent Digression——For, as Selden has it, *long they preached, and much Stir was made about it, before they could get an usual Payment for them.*

Be pleased, Gentlemen, to bear with one or two Quotations more, tending to clear up the Arts whereby this great Point was carried——*He is a good Christian*, says a Writer about 900 Years ago, *who comes often to the Church, and never tastes of his Fruits till he has offered the First to God; who punctually*
pays

pays his Tythes to the Poor, and reverences the Priest with due Homage.—

Again in Burchard Bishop of Worms, Hast thou at any Time neglected to pay thy Tenths to God, which God himself hath ordained to be given him? Or if thou hast done so, or consented to the defrauding the Church therein, first restore to God fourfold, and then must thou suffer Penance with Bread and Water only, for twenty Days.

In this last Instance the Church alone is mentioned, and the Poor are entirely out of the Question: 'Tis worthy Remark, likewise, that the Awe of Confession, seems here to be made use of, as well as the Terror of Penance, to compel a punctual Payment. To all which, moreover, were added shocking Stories of God's Vengeance on the Enemies of the Clergy: Such as that of Eucherius Bishop of Orleans, who declared he saw in a Vision, Charles Martel King of France, burning in Hell for having seized the Revenues of the Church.

F

But

But, notwithstanding all these and numberless other Devices, as soon as the reverend Brotherhood, according to the Modes of the Church, made a Plea of the voluntary Offerings of some, to establish a Rule for exacting Tythes as a Duty from all, in some Places they met with great Opposition: and so high was the Resentment of the People carried in *Denmark* on this Occasion, that it was one of the principal Articles of Accusation against their King *Knute* the Fourth, whom they betrayed and murdered. And, about the Year 1180, when one of their Bishops would have enforced the Payment of them on Pain of a perpetual Interdict, they not only absolutely refused, but gave him to understand by Message, that he and his Brethren should continue the Duties of their Function, as usual, or instantly depart their Country——threatening them with the severest Punishment in Case of Disobedience. All the Northern Nations,
in

in general, it seems, being not prevail'd on, but with the utmost Difficulty, to submit to so unjust and so unwarranted an Imposition: Nay, in the Diocese of *Oldenburg*, where Tythes were in a Manner established, those who had improved the Desarts of *Wagria*, could by no means be brought to part with a Tythe of their Increase, tho' they were willing to make a competent Acknowledgement. Neither could their Bishop, by urging the Example of all the Churches, particularly those in their Neighbourhood; or pleading the divine Institution of Tythes, nor, tho' seconded by all the Power of their Prince, get the better of their Resolution: loudly protesting with Tumult and Clamours, *That they never would bow their Necks to a Yoke, that was the Burtben of the whole Christian World.*

Even so early as the Days of *Charles the Great*, when Tythes were collected as a Duty by Civil, as well as Ecclesi-

astic Authority, *Alcuin*, in an Epistle to that Monarch, expressly calls the exacting of Tythes, a *Toke*; and dissuades the Emperor from imposing it on the *Huns* and *Saxons*, lately converted to the Christian Faith, till they were sufficiently disciplined to bear it.——*We know*, says he, *'tis a very good Thing to pay Tythes, but 'tis better to forego them, than let Religion suffer.* Which is a plain Indication, that the Clergy let their Converts into the Secret by Degrees; and never presumed to domineer over their Property, till they had got the Conscience into their Custody first: but then the awful Name of Deity was instantly us'd to fleece them without Mercy; and *serve God!* was but another Name for *Bribe the Clergy!*

But, Gentlemen, these sacred Drones, in the human Hive, had too darling a Point in View to give over the Pursuit for any Difficulties, or Discouragements whatever: If one Season was not favourable,

conrable, they diligently watched the approach of another : if Force failed, they had Recourse to Fraud ; and if one Snare did not take, they instantly baited a Second.

Thus, tho', in the early Ages of the Church, there is not the least Trace to be found of any such Institution as Tythes, but the Alms of the Faithful appears to have been the sole Support of their Ministers, and that *too in common with the Poor*, as soon as Length of Time, the Obscurity of antient Records, the Ignorance of the Laity, and the Misfortunes of the Public gave leave, not only sacred Writ was quoted as an Authority for this anti-christian Usurpation, but Canons and Constitutions of the Church were forged to make appear the Right of the Clergy thro' all Ages.

Thus, in the Collections of *Ivo*, Bishop of *Chartres*, a Provincial-Canon
(made

(made by the Council of Bishops, held at *Mascon*, a Bishoprick in the Diocese of *Lyons*, anno 586) is quoted, wherein Tythes are expressly enjoined: But, on the Credit and Veracity of *Selden*, it appears so little Regard has been paid to this Evidence, that, says he, *whatever the Cause was, not so much as any Canon has been found mentioned, as of received Authority in any of the more antient Compilers of synodal Decrees; notwithstanding, that the fullest of them, I mean* ISSIDORE, *lived long after this Council was said to be held, and had some other Synods of the Continent of FRANCE, as ORLEANS, &c.*

In the same *Fuo*, likewise, a Decretal of Pope *Gelasius*, dated 492, is made to enjoin the Payment of Tythes: Whereas that Article is palpably spurious, and was added by Pope *Leo IV.* 350 Years after. Another Constitution in their Favour is attributed to the Council of *Orleans* held in

in the Year 507: whereas not a Word of Tythes was mentioned in that Council: The Passages on that Head being an Interpolation, and inserted with a marginal Reference to some Council of Orleans of which there remains no Record.

The Truth is, says SELDEN, that Canon of his (Ivo's) is made up of two Councils indeed; the first of ORLEANS and the ninth of TOLEDO; and agrees well with both, saving for so much as is expressly spoken of Tythes. Adding, that what was formerly spoken of Offerings, both he and other Authors, Burchard and Gratian particularly, apply to Tythes.

An Infidelity, in my humble Opinion, neither to be palliated, nor forgiven!

But these are but Peccadillos to what follows: No less than a thundering Canon,

non, out of the same *Ivo*, fathered on the Synod of *Seville*, *anno* 610, which expressly commands not only every Husbandman, but every Artizan, to pay Tythes; and roars out a whole Volley of Curses, in Case of the least Infringement, or Violation. I say, Gentlemen, such is this formidable Canon, if you will believe the honest Bishop; but, on the Evidence of our noble Countryman (which, as more disinterested, has a better Title to our Regard) *The Council of that Year and Place is extant whole in diverse Editions, as it was certified by eight Bishops, who were at it; and in that, no Taste is of any such Matter, viz. Tythes.*

However, Gentlemen, at last we have a genuine Prescript of a provincial Synod, held at *Friuli* in 791, in favour of First-Fruits and Tythes. And what do you think is there made the Foundation of this stupendous Claim? Why truly the darling Text in *Malachi*, before quoted,

3

Bring

Bring ye all the Tythes into the Store-House, &c. And, this being confidently supposed to be as much a Duty under the Gospel-Dispensation, as under the Law, the reverend Fathers make no scruple to apply the Curse denounced in the same Chapter on the *Jews* for their Disobedience, to terrify their Flock into a blind Subjection to their spiritual Shearers. *Will a Man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.* But ye say, *wherein have we robbed thee? In Tythes, and Offerings. Ye are cursed with a Curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole Nation.*

But these Perversions of the *Jewish* Ritual, these Falsifications of Councils, and these Abuses of Authorities are but slight Samples of ecclesiastic Cunning, and to be esteemed but the mere Bellows of these crafty God-Smiths to set their Forge to work—The very *Apostles* themselves are obliged to sweat at their Anvil, and lend them a Hand to hammer out Fetters to enslave Mankind.

G

To

To this End, many Books of Apostolic Constitutions, forsooth, were fram'd; in which all imaginable Care is taken of the Riches, Power and Grandeur of the Church, which their venerable Master so expressly obliged them to disclaim-- In one Passage of these Tools of Priest-Craft, we are told that First Fruits and Tythes are due by the Command of God; and that the Bishop, as the Man of God, or rather his Embassador or Representative, may command the Payment of them. In another St. *Matthew* in Person is introduced, prescribing in the following dictatorial Manner, *I Matthew, farther ordain* that all First-Fruits be brought to the Bishops and to the Priests and to the Deacons for their Maintenance; and that all Tythes be offered for the rest of the Clergy and of Virgins and of Widows and of poor People. And in a Third it is commanded *to honour Priests as Kings, and pay Tribute to them as Kings*; and the Particulars mentioned in that pointed Speech

Speech of *Samuel* to the *Jews*, to deter them from chusing a King are urged, as belonging of Right to the Bishop, tho' instanced Tyranny in the Prince: A Speech so very remarkable, Gentlemen, that, I think, it will be needless to make any Apology for quoting it at large.

This will be the Manner of the King that shall reign over you: He will take your Sons, and appoint them for himself for his Chariots, and to be his Horsemen, and some shall run before his Chariots. And he will appoint him Captains over Thousands, and Captains over Fifties, and will set them to ear his Ground, and to reap his Harvest, and to make his Instruments of War, and Instruments of his Chariots. And he will take your Daughters to be Confectioners, and to be Cooks, and to be Bakers. And he will take your Fields, and your Vineyards, and your Oliveways, even the best of them, and give them to his Servants. And he will take the Tenth of your Seed, and of your Vine-
G 2
yards,

yards, and give to his Officers and to his Servants, And he will take your Men-Servants and your Maid-Servants, and your goodliest young Men, and your Asses, and put them to his Work. He will take the tenth of your Sheep; and ye shall be his Servants. And ye shall cry out in that Day, because of your King which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that Day.

Yes, Gentlemen, without the least Ground, the Authority of the Gospels is made to support these insolent Claims in Favour of the Priesthood: But tho' the Authority is imaginary, the Claims are real; and we are, in some Sense, obliged to that Artificer of Fraud, whoever he was, that so plainly gave us to understand how dearly we were to pay for the Tyranny of his Brethren: This is, indeed, a true Miniature of their Principles and Practice; and *Issachar's* Ass, groaning under a double Burthen of Tythes and Donations, with an over-grown, purisy Prelate a-top,
is

is a true Type of a stupid, Priest-ridden
 Laity.—

'Tis impossible to take our Leave of
 this Passage, without observing to you,
 with what Violence they torture Holy-
 writ to their own selfish Ends.

One Part of the old Law is still in
 Force and another superseded; the
 last on the Authority of *Christ*, the first
 on their own. Tho' Sacrifices cease,
 Tythes remain; and tho' the Tribe of
Levi is no where to be found, the Rights
 of that Tribe are to endure for ever. In
 short, whatever is for their Turn in the
 Law, however foreign to the Gospel,
 they adopt; whatever the Gospel enjoins,
 that is repugnant to their Claims under
 the Law, they reject; making the Scrip-
 tures, both old and new, but a Mask
 of Godliness to cover the Harpy-face of
 Rapine and Imposture.—

Were

Were we, Gentlemen, to take such Liberties with the divine Writings in general, or this severe Speech of *Samuel's* in particular, what Reproaches, what Anathemas should we incur from the Pulpit? what Persecutions, what Penalties from the Law?—But we are more modest, and, content with Self-Defence, neither abuse Reason nor pervert Revelation, to encroach on the Privileges or Possessions of our Fellow-Creatures.

Thus, Gentlemen, I have presented you with a slight Sample of such of their Arts, as refer to their Practices on the Mind, for establishing their Claims to worldly Wealth, in direct Opposition to the Doctrines of *Christ* and his Apostles.

What remain belong principally to the Body, and were propagated by Terror, Compulsion, Punishments and all the Power of the Civil Magistrate——But how they attained the Use, or were in-

indulged in the Abuse of this Power, will fall most naturally under Consideration in our next; when we come to treat expressly of ecclesiastic Jurisdiction: as likewise when we particularly examine the Progress of Christianity in this Island, from the first Mission of *Austin* the Monk, to the Dissolution of Episcopacy, in the time of the Civil-Wars.

What has been already said will suffice to prove, that the very Ground-work of this boasted Establishment of Church-Revenues, was founded on Fraud and Delusion, Avarice and Oppression, and the Superstructure rais'd by servile Ignorance and blind Zeal. That the Grant to the Tribe of *Levi* neither did nor could refer to any other Priesthood; and is wholly inconsistent with the disinterested Spirit of the Gospel. That the Wealth of the Church is the real ANTI-CHRIST, and has been the sole Idol of clerical Worship for Numbers of Ages. That, from the time this Idol was first set up,

Piety,

Piety, Unity and Charity forsook the polluted Temple, and all the opposite Vices officiated in their stead; agreeable to the very old Remark, *That with wooden Chalice we had golden Priests; but with golden Chalice we had wooden Priests: or, more properly, brazen ones.*—

Now, Gentlemen, 'tis recorded of the *Messiah*, that, after his Resurrection, he should say to his Apostles, *Lo! I am with you always to the End of the World;* that is to say, according to the Interpretation of our spiritual Task-Masters, he would preside in his Church to the end of the World: whence it will infallibly follow, that that can be no Church of his where Gold is worshipped in his Stead; where Meekness, Humility, Forbearance, Self-denial and Mortification, are never heard of but in the Lessons of the Day, read by some starveling Curate, who, literally speaking, *lives not by Bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God;*

I

where

where Flattery licks the Dust on one side and Tyranny tramples on Mankind on the other ; where Religion gives the Precept, but Libertinism sets the Example ; and, in one Word, where the Mask of Hypocrisy, tho' as broad as the Veil of the Temple, will not hide the bloated Face of pamper'd Priestcraft, lying in Ambush beneath it.

Here, Gentlemen, I should conclude, but that another Passage from the illustrious *Milton*, comes so appositely in my Way, that my Discourse would not come to a proper Period without it.

“ As for the just Policy that long
 “ Use and Custom, and these many
 “ Laws, which, you say, have confer'd
 “ these Benefits upon you ; it has been
 “ nothing else but the superstitious De-
 “ votion of Princes and great Men that
 “ knew no better, or the base Importu-
 “ nity of begging Friars, haunting and
 H “ har-

“ harraſſing the Death-Beds of Men de-
 “ parting this Life, in a blind and
 “ wretched Condition of Hope to me-
 “ rit Heaven for the building of Chur-
 “ ches, Cloyſters and Convents. The
 “ moſt of your vaunted Poſſeſſions, and
 “ thoſe proud Endowments ye as fin-
 “ fully waſte, what are they but the
 “ black Revenues of Purgatory, the
 “ Price of abuſed and murdered Souls;
 “ the damned Simony of Trentals
 “ and Indulgences to mortal Sin? How
 “ can ye chuſe but inherit the Curſe
 “ that goes along with ſuch a Patri-
 “ mony? Alas! if there be any Release-
 “ ment, any Mitigation, or more tole-
 “ rable Being for the Souls of our miſ-
 “ guided Anceſtors; could we imagine
 “ there might be any Recovery to ſome
 “ Degree of Eaſe, left for as many of
 “ them as are loſt, there cannot be a
 “ better Way than to take the miſbe-
 “ ſtowed Wealth which they were
 “ cheated of, from theſe our Prelates,
 who

“ who are the true Successors of those,
 “ that help’d them into the other World,
 “ with this Conceit of meriting by their
 “ Goods, which was their final Undoing;
 “ and to bestow their beneficent Gifts
 “ upon Places and Means of Christian
 “ Education, and the faithful Labourers
 “ in *God’s* Harvest.

F I N I S.



" who are the true successors of those
 " that help'd them into the other World,
 " with this Consent of meeting by their
 " Goods which was their final Undoing;
 " and to payow their benevolent Gifts
 " upon Places of Christian
 " Education, as
 " is God's Will



T. I. W. I. R.

The Ax laid to the Root

OF

CHRISTIAN PRIESTCRAFT.

IN FOUR DISCOURSES.

By a LAYMAN.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

Usurpation of Church-Power.

*Why seek we Truths from Priests?
The Smiles of Courtiers and the Harlots Tears,
The Tradesman's Oath and Mourning of an Heir,
Are Truths to what Priests tell——
—Ob why has Priesthood Privilege to lye,
And yet to be believed?*

LEE.

LONDON:

Printed for T. COOPER, at the Globe in Paternoster-
Row. MDCCXLII.

(Price One Shilling.)

The Ax laid to the Root

OF

CHRISTIAN PRIESTCRAFT.

In Four Discourses.

By a LAYMAN.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

Usurpation of Church-Power.

4-6

What are Parishes from Priests?

The Smiles of Countess and the Parson's Tears,
The Trade-Union's Oath and the Parson's Tears,

The Parishes to what Priests tell
—On what Parishes Priests tell
and yet to be believed?

Lee.



Printed for T. Cooper, 10, Pall Mall, in Pall Mall.

(Price One Shilling.)



DISCOURSE III.

ON THE Usurpation of CHURCH-POWER.

GENTLEMEN,



HE Absurdities maintain'd
by Priests, and by which
they are maintain'd, are so
flagrant, that, were it not
for their Concern in the
Event, they must laugh abundantly, in
their Sleeves, at any serious Undertaking
to refute them: But, tho' those in the
Secret ever so manifestly consider Gain

as the only Godliness, they have, nevertheless, the Art to make Deceit itself appear so venerable, that Mount *Sinai*, with all its Thunders, seem'd not more unapproachable to the wondring *Israelites*, than the Church and its Authorities to modern Bigots: Nor has it been the Fault of our conscientious Prelates, that whoever trespassed on the Bounds of one, did not incur the same Penalties with him, who presum'd to encroach on the other: Had they but Power to enact, *That whoever intrudes should die*, there is no need to fear their not exacting Obedience, or insisting on the Forfeit.

This dreadful Pale of Separation was once in Being even in this Land of Liberty, and History is full of its tragic Effects: we have infinite Reason then to make Use of this golden Period to prevent its Re-establishment and continue the Blessings we enjoy down to the latest Posterity. The Mercies of Priests like those of the Wicked are Cruelty; and 'tis
Charity

Charity to the deluded, as well as Self-Defence, to preserve Mankind from so dire a Yoke—

In Order to which and in Tenderneſs to thoſe who have been hitherto frighted from attempting their own Deliverance, we muſt attack even Hypocriſy and Abſurdity with a grave Face; and confine our ſelves principally to Reaſoning, tho' the Subject infinitely better deſerves Contempt and Ridicule.

Gentlemen, one Pillar of this Houſe of *Dagon* we have already ſhaken to its Foundation; and, with Truth on our Side, we need not fear giving an equal Shock to the other: not being of God it cannot ſtand; and if it falls, let the *Philiftines* beware! In our laſt, we proved, that Tythes were of *Antichriſtian* Growth; and in this we ſhall endeavour to do the ſame by Eccleſiaſtic Jurisdiction, Power and Titles.

But, before we proceed with what may be thought so dry a Disquisition, let me have the Honour of entertaining you with a short Tale from the excellent *Milton*.

Upon a Time, the Body summon'd
all the Members to meet in the Guild,
for the Common Good (as *Æsop's*
Chronicles aver many stranger Acci-
dents) The *Head* by Right takes the
first Seat, and next to it a huge and
monstrous *Wen*, little less than the
Head it self, growing to it by a nar-
rower Excrefcency. The *Members*
amaz'd, began to ask one another what
he was that took Place next their Chief;
none could resolve: Whereat the *Wen*,
tho' somewhat unwieldy, with much
ado gets up, and speaks to the Assembly
to this Purpose: That as he was in
Place second to the *Head*, so by due
of Merit; that he was to it an Orna-
ment, and Strength, and of special near
Relation;

Relation ; and that, if the *Head* should
 fail, none were fitter than himself to
 step into his Place; therefore, he thought
 it for the Honour of the *Body*, that
 such Dignities and rich Endowments
 should be decreed him, as did adorn
 and set out the *noblest Members*. To this
 was answered, That it should be con-
 sulted. Then was a wise, and learned
Philosopher sent for, that knew all the
 Charters, Laws, and Tenures of the
 Body : On him it is imposed by all, as
 chief Committee, to examine and dis-
 cuss the Claim and Petition of Right
 put in by the *Wen* ; who, soon per-
 ceiving the Matter, and wondring at
 the Boldness of such a swollen Tumour,
 will't thou, quoth he, who art but a
 Bottle of vicious and harden'd Excre-
 ments, contend with the lawful and
 free-born *Members*, whose certain Num-
 ber is set by an ancient and ir repeal-
 able Statute ? *Head* thou art none, tho'
 thou receive this huge Substance from
 it : What Office bearest thou ? What
 Good

' Good canst thou shew by thee done to
 ' the Common-Weal? The *Wen*, not ea-
 ' sily dasht, replies, That his Office was
 ' his Glory; for so oft as the Soul would
 ' retire out of the *Head*, from over the
 ' steaming Vapours of the lower Parts,
 ' to divine Contemplation, with him she
 ' found the purest and quietest Retreat;
 ' as being the most remote from Soil,
 ' and Disturbance. *Lourdan!* quoth the
 ' *Philosopher*, thy Folly is as great as thy
 ' Filth; know that all the Faculties of
 ' the Soul are confin'd of old to their
 ' several Vessels and Ventricles, from
 ' which they cannot part without Dissol-
 ' ution of the whole Body; and that
 ' thou containst no good Thing in thee, but
 ' a Heap of hard and loathsome Unclean-
 ' ness, and art to the *Head* a foul Disfigure-
 ' ment and Burden; when I have cut thee
 ' off, (as by the Help of these Implements
 ' I will do) all Men shall see.'

Such, Gentlemen, were the *Wens* of
 those Times; but these were modest
 to

to such as have been gathering since ; such as have not only contended for a Right to lord it over the Members, but a Right, a divine Right even to jostle the very *Head* out of its Place ; at least to share with him in his Pre-eminence and Jurisdiction ; and give the Law as absolutely to the Body, in one half of its Offices, as the Head in the other——But of these more in their Place——We are now to proceed to this mysterious, divine Right ; which, tho' a self-evident Absurdity and demonstrated to be so, over and over again, by some of the most masterly Hands in the Universe, must be warr'd with perpetually, that its Power and Influence may be destroy'd, as well as its Title : To leave the Enemy still in Possession is to lose the Use of Victory ; and barren Laurels in Controversy, are as little to be valued as an empty Triumph, without any Acquisition to render it of Importance to the Common-Wealth, as well as honourable to the Conqueror.

To

To begin then, Gentlemen, as high as the celebrated Adventure of the *Burning Bush*, we find, at the very Threshold of our Enquiry, that God revealed himself to a Layman, of the Tribe of *Levi*, the Third in *Israel*, without any Regard to the chimerical, patriarchal Right of *Reuben*, the First, either to the Throne or the Mitre; and in his first Interview with *Moses*, avowedly declares, that *Aaron* his Brother should be his Creature: The Words are as express as possible; and demonstrate that the Priest was to be but a Tool of the Legislator's: *He shall be to thee instead of a Mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of a God*: In Pursuance of which Scheme, we find, that, when the Law was to be deliver'd by *Jehovah* in Person, in Sight of all *Israel*, 'twas delivered into the Hand of *Moses*; *Aaron* not being so much as permitted to approach the Deity: on the contrary the utmost Favour allowed him is to worship afar off; while the

Layman

Layman conversed with him, as a Man with his Friend, face to face: But the Almighty graciously bestowing Forty Days on the Ritual of the *Jews*, though he created the Universe in Six; *Aaron*, even in his immediate Presence, as one may say, sets up a Calf to be worshipped in his room; and by this Means, so highly provokes his righteous Brother, that, in his Rage, he breaks the sacred Tables engraved by the Finger of God himself; and, in Consequence, puts his Omnipotence to Forty Days more Trouble to renew them. Nor is the fatal Event of this strange Story less remarkable, or more for the Honour of Priests, than the amazing Levity which occasioned it: For when *Moses*, after having wonderfully calcined this upstart Deity, cries out; *Who is on the LORD's Side, let him come unto Me!* immediately all the Sons of Levi (no Doubt the principal Ministers in the late Sacrifice) gather themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, thus saith the LORD GOD of

C

ISRAEL,

ISRAEL, put every Man his Sword by his Side, and go in and out from Gate to Gate, throughout the Camp, and slay every Man his Brother, and every Man his Companion, and every Man his Neighbour! And the Children of LEVI did according to the Word of MOSES, and there fell that Day about three thousand Men---And this extroradinary Action was done it seems, Gentlemen, even to qualify them for the Priesthood. For MOSES had said consecrate yourselves to-day to the LORD, even every Man upon his Son, and every Man upon his Brother, that he may bestow a Blessing upon you this Day. An answerable Proof of the divine Legation of MOSES; and that a Priest may be cruel without Scandal to his Office!

But, to go on, tho' so many Thousands of the Lay-Beasts, as the reverend Mr. Lesley is pleased to call them, were to fall indiscriminately to appease the divine Vengeance, Aaron, the first Mover, was not to lose his Preferment. 'Twas enough

enough for him to say with a dissembled Humility, *Let not the Anger of my Lord wax hot ! Thou knowest the People, that they are set on Mischief :* And that, on throwing the Gold, he had levied on them, into the Fire, *out came this Calf*, and all is well : Neither *Moses*, nor *God* himself resent any farther this Apostacy of their first Minister, but proceed, as before, to prepare for his Ordination with all the Pomp imaginable-- This, however, is observable in the Ceremony, which is the great Point we aim at, that *Moses* consecrates him with his own Hand, by the Directions of *God* himself ; prefacing to the People, *This is the Thing which the Lord hath commanded to be done.*

Thus the civil Magistrate is here introduced publicly, and in Person, consecrating the Ministers of the Altar ; and not only *Aaron* the chief Priest, but his Sons also ; nay, for the Time being, he himself officiates as a Priest : as if to

make it incontestable, that the Office they were to hold, was but a Deputation from him ; and which he, as the Head of the People, had the primary Right to exercise whenever he pleased--- Yet farther; when *Nadab and Abihu*, tho' the Sons of *Aaron*, fond of handselling their new Censers and of making a Figure before the People, pressed to the Altar, *with strange Fire which the Lord commanded them not*, 'twas not their divine Right that could excuse them : But Fire from the Lord himself went out, and devoured them ; And *AARON*, tho' present, *beld his Peace* : nay *Moses* commands the Father and the Brothers not to mourn for the Slain : And 'tis strongly insinuated by *God* himself in the next Verse, forbidding *Aaron* and his Sons the Taste of Wine and strong Drink, on Pain of Death, when they entered the Tabernacle, that the Conduct of these hot, young Priestlings on this Occasion, had given Rise to this sudden Interdict. A very wholesome Hint, Gentlemen,

clemen, to the Clergy of all Persuasions
whatever!

To evince yet more clearly the Superiority of the Magistrate over the Priest, *Moses* chides in Anger with *Eleazar* and *Itamar*, *Aaron's* surviving Sons, for not having eaten the Sin-offering in the holy Place, as *God* had commanded; and nothing less than *Aaron's* pleading his and their apparent Unworthiness, on account of the late Trespas of *Nadab* and *Abihu* could appease him—But this Struggle for Power and Precedency with the civil Magistrate, even in these early Days of the Priesthood, and its tragical Event, were not sufficient to deter them from a farther Tryal; *Aaron* himself, in Conjunction with his Sister *Miriam*, presumes next to rival him in both. *Hath the LORD*, say they, *indeed spoken only unto MOSES? Hath he not spoken also by us?* Nor, till *God* himself interposes again in Favour of his Friend and chastises the Impertinence of *Miriam*

riam with a Leprosy, do they return to their Duty and humble themselves on Account of their ridiculous Usurpation. Yet even these aspired only to an Equality with the supreme Magistrate, not to chase him entirely out of the House of the Lord and arrogantly advance themselves in his room. Indeed their Conduct on this Occasion was a pretty glaring Instance of Priestly Ingratitude; for *Moses* had taken care to secure to them the *Best of the Oil, the Best of the Wine, the Best of the Wheat, and what was first ripe of every Kind of Fruit*; and yet all would not do, unless they shared in, or perhaps in Time monopolized the Sovereignty too: And as these aspired to be joint Legislators with *Moses*, so the Sons of *Levi* aspired to be joint High-Priests with *Aaron*; which provoked the meekest of Men as he is called, to utter that prophetic Reproach. *Ye take too much upon you, ye Sons of LEVI! Seemeth it a small Thing unto you, that the GOD of ISRAEL hath separated you from the Congregation of*
ISRAEL.

ISRAEL to bring you near to himself, &c.
and seek ye the Priesthood also?

Such an encroaching Spirit reigned among Ecclesiastics appointed by God himself; and so hard were they to be kept within due Bounds, even by him that made them; tho' the Earth opened, the Fire of the Lord descended and Plagues of all Sorts instantly raged to punish their Temerity! — But with whatever Difficulty 'twas done, *Moses*, with God Almighty for his Second, made a Shift to maintain his Superiority; tho' not without the Assistance of Seventy Elders chosen from among the Laity by the Advice of *Jethro*, to be his Co-adjutors. Nay, when *Aaron* was to be gathered to his People, by an exprefs Mesſage from the Deity, he was not trusted to name or consecrate his Successor: But *Moses*, taking upon him again the priestly Office, strips *Aaron* of his Garments, a little oddly it must be owned, even before his Death and puts them on *Eleazar* his Son: And when
he

he himself received the same Notice of his approaching End, by divine Command he appoints *Joshua* to succeed him; *Eleazar* the new *High-Priest* being only to ask Council for him, after the Judgment of *URIM*, before the Lord: And God, in Person, afterwards limits expressly the new General's Commission to the Letter of the Law delivered by *Moses*: which very plainly indicates no new Powers were delegated to the Priesthood; consequently, they were subordinate, as before, to the civil Magistrate; and had no Authority beyond the Sanctuary, to offer Sacrifices, receive Tythes, read the Law and determine controversial Points, in concert with the Judge, where the Case was too nice and subtle for ordinary Decision.

Yet farther, thro' the whole Book of *JOSHUA*, God, still disdaining all immediate Correspondence with those holy Butchers, is introduced as doing that Honour to the General only: And when

any extraordinary Action is to be done, his uniform Phrase to *Joshua* is, *Command the Priests*; as those who were to all Intents and Purposes the Servants of the supreme Magistrate. 'Tis observable also, from the the seventeenth Chapter of *Judges*, that Lay-Ordination was not confined to the Magistrate only; but, as he nominated the public Priests, every private Man instituted whom he pleased for his domestic Chaplain. Thus *Micah* first consecrates one of his Sons to be his Priest; and afterwards, when an itinerant *Levite*, who was out of Place, luckily fell in his Way, he hires his Holiness for ten Shekels of Silver by the Year, a Suit of Apparel, and the Run of his Kitchen; and not only hires, but consecrates him too; adding this remarkable Expression, which aptly accounts for all the voluntary Concessions made to the Clergy, from the Beginning to this Day; *Now know I that the LORD will do me Good, seeing I have a LEVITE to my Priest*——Indeed the whole of this

D

Adventure

Adventure has something in it so characteristical of our spiritual Guides, that it emphatically deserves a Discourse by itself; which, in due Time, we may, perhaps, present to the Consideration of the Public.

Thus far, Gentlemen, it plainly appears, that the *Jewish* Magistracy was superiour to the Priesthood; but, after the Death of *Joshua* and under the lax Government of the JUDGES, in spite of the Constitutions appointed by *God* himself, it must be owned the Priesthood usurped the Power of the Magistracy; and what were the Consequences? Why truly Lust, Rapine, Atheism, even in the *Holy* of *Holies*; Battles lost to their Enemies the *Philistines*; and the mysterious *Ark* itself made a Prey to the Uncircumcised! Nor, whatever Advantages they obtained for a while under the less-obnoxious Government of *Samuel*, his Sons soon degenerated like those of *Eli*: *Turning aside after Lucre, taking Bribes, and perverting Judgment*; in so much that the
 People

People grew weary of their insupportable Yoke and thought that of Kingship, however dreadfully painted by *Samuel*, the more eligible of the Two-- From which Time, the Priest again acts an under-Part; and tho' *Saul* (who seems to have been elected only for the Conceit of his being in Search of certain strayed Asses) according to the Text, *The Asses thou wentst to seek are found*; I say, tho' *Saul* stood in Awe of the Prophet, who designed him only to be his Creature, yet *Abimelech* the Priest had no sooner declared himself of the Faction of *David* his Rival, but he ordered both him and all his Family to be put to the Sword, as guilty of High Treason against the State: *Abiathar* too, the only one who escaped the Slaughter, tho' his Family was ruined for their Attachment to *David*, is afterwards degraded from the Priesthood by *Solomon* and *Zadok* advanced in his Stead. The same *Solomon*, likewise, at the Dedication of his Temple, takes upon him, in the Right of

Moses, the whole sacerdotal Office, as *David* had done before, on his Conducting the *Ark* to *Jerusalem*: 'Tis he that prays, vows, blesses, sacrifices, and performs all the supreme Functions of the Altar; while the *Priest*, and *Levites*, are only his Ministers and Assistants. Nor was the regal Power exerted in the Sanctuary only in Points of Ceremony or Authority, but in those of Property also: Thus when the *Priests* had for Years together secreted the Money, which King *Jeboash* had given them a Power to solícite for repairing the Temple, and a Chest (no Doubt strongly barricaded) was appointed Receiver-General in their Stead, his *Jewish* Majesty appoints his Secretary to be a Check on the High-Priest, at the Opening of it; and in seeing it bestowed according to the religious Intent of the Donors: To which may be added, that *Josiah* acted on the like Occasion in the like Manner: and yet farther, that all their Princes, not excepting the greatest Bigots among them, made no Scruple to invade the

the

the holy Treasury and apply its Riches to the Service of the State, as often as the Exigency of their Affairs required it. Upon the Whole, then, 'tis manifest that what Power the Priesthood had under the *Mosaic* Dispensation, was confined solely to the Interpretation of the Law; which being of a mixed Nature, part civil, part religious, and the Duties of both enforced with the same Punishments, naturally and in a Manner necessarily reposed a double Trust in the Bosom of the Priest: but this Trust was so far from being independent of the supreme Magistrates, that, as far as it related to Temporals, it was in the strictest Subordination to him; and in Spirituals, it was equally subordinate to the written Law given by *Moses*, under *God*, their original Legislator: Consequently admitted little Room for priestly Encroachments, under any Pretence, how specious soever,

Neither

Neither does it appear that these ecclesiastic Judges were any other, than a kind of stated Referees, by whom all Intricacies, arising from Obscurities in the Text, were to be explain'd and determined; not arbitrarily, or according to their own Will and Pleasure, but agreeable to the true Meaning of those ancient Statutes; which, 'twas suppos'd, they understood best, as conversing with them most; but even in the midst of these, the King presided, as well as among the seventy Elders which form'd their Senate; as is manifest from that Passage in the second Book of *Chronicles*: Moreover in JERUSALEM did JEHOSEPHAT set of the LEVITES and of the PRIESTS, and of the Chief of the Fathers of ISRAEL, for the Judgment of the LORD, and for Controversies, when they returned to JERUSALEM. And, to crown all, 'tis likewise demonstrable, that the secular Court of the Elders had the Supremacy over this of the Ecclesiastics: for when the Priests and

and Prophets had condemned *Jeremiah* the Prophet to Death, for having prophesied against *Jerusalem*; the Elders put a Negative on their Sentence, saying, *This Man is not worthy to die, for he hath spoken to us in the Name of the LORD OUR GOD*; which is, beside, a pregnant Proof that 'tis not Equity, but Vengeance which is principally pursued by these holy Assassins; and that to be an Enemy to them, is the readiest Road to be declar'd an Enemy to the State; as *Jeremiah* himself sufficiently evinces in one of his subsequent Chapters. *Then said they. Come! Let us devise Devices against JEREMIAH! For the Law shall not perish from the Priest, nor Council from the Wise, nor the Word from the Prophet: Come! and let us smite him with the Tongue! and let us not give Heed to any of his Words!*

But, notwithstanding the innumerable Checks on these venerable *Rabbies*, the Law it self, tho' revealed, from the Top of Mount *SINAI*, by the Almighty in

Person, by Sound of Trumpet and amidst the Roarings of continued Thunders, became a Grievance in their Hands; and *Ezekiel*, in his adorable Name, expressly condemns it, as a Burthen too heavy for human Nature to bear. *Wherefore I gave them also Statutes that were not good, and Judgments whereby they should not live. Isaiah* goes yet farther; and, in the Name of the *Lord*, declares their Oblations vain, their Incense an Abomination, their new Moons, Sabbaths, and Assemblies, what he cannot away with, and Iniquity even their solemn Meeting. *My Soul hateth them*, says he, *they are a Trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.* And *Jeremiah*, makes God absolutely disclaim their very Appointment. *For I spake not unto your Fathers, nor commanded them in the Day, that I brought them out of the Land of EGYPT, concerning burnt Offerings, or Sacrifices; But this I commanded them, saying, Obey my Voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall my People! To conclude upon this Head; Micah, by*
the

the same omnipotent Authority, having set aside the whole Pomp of Ceremony and Sacrifice as detestable to God and useless to Man, gives us the Sum of our Duty in Three short Precepts, that proclaim their own Divinity. *Do justly! Love Mercy! Walk humbly with thy God!*

Thus, Gentlemen, in Obedience to Holy-Writ, should we allow that the Power of the Priesthood was originally appointed by God, 'tis clear, that very Power was under the Direction of the Magistrate, and the Priests themselves but a Part of his State-Equipage: By the same Revelation, 'tis likewise as clear, that this Appointment, of whatever Nature it was, was limited to the *Jews* only, as God's peculiar People; nor is there one Text in the whole Bible, that renders it their Duty to make Converts, or propagate the same Ritual thro' the neighbouring Nations: Drive out the *Canaanites*! we meet with often, but, convert them! never: whence 'tis plain, that, if they

E

were

were not enjoin'd, in those Days, to extend their Faith with their Monarchy, or endeavour to profelyte those they could not conquer, none of their Ceremonials can possibly be binding to us, at this Distance of Time and Place ; but, as we are free from the Burthen of their Sacrifices, Circumcisions, &c. we are as little liable to the Imposition of their Priests, or the Exaction of Tythes to maintain them.

But Holy Writ, as already seen, farther informs us, God himself was weary of them, as well as the People ; and so averse to their being propagated, or even continued in his own Sanctuary, that he speaks of them with loathing : And, 'tis yet more remarkable, that tho' the Prophets, who foretell the approaching Ruin of the Monarchy, never fail to add, that it shall be restored with greater Lustre than ever ; yet those who speak with such Bitterness of the Priests, as ISAIAH, *Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel, Head and Tail, Branch and Rush,*
(or

or perhaps Root) in one Day; the ancient and honourable, * who is the Head, and the Prophet, that teacheth Lies, * who is the Tail. For the Leaders of this People cause them to err and they that are led of them are destroyed. Again in another Place. His Watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb Dogs, they cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy Dogs, which can never have enough; and they are Shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own Way, every one for his Gain from his Quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch Wine and we will fill our selves with strong Drink; and to-morrow shall be as this Day, and much more abundant. Thus Jeremy, likewise. The Priests said not where is the Lord? And they that handle the Law, knew me not: The Pastors also transgressed against me, and the Prophets prophesied by BAAL and walked after Things, that do not profit. Again. The Prophets prophesied falsely, and the Priests bear rule by their Means;

E 2

and

• • In the Text HE.

and my People love to have it so : And what will ye do in the End thereof? Again. For the Pastors are become brutish and have not sought the LORD ; therefore they shall not prosper and all their Flocks shall be scattered. Again. Many Pastors have destroyed my Vineyard, they have trodden my Portion under Foot. They have made my pleasant Portion a desolate Wilderness. The whole Land is made desolate, because no Man layeth it to heart. Again. Then the LORD said unto me. The Prophets prophesy Lies in my Name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them : they prophesy unto you a false Vision and Divination, and a thing of nought, and the Deceits of their Heart. Again. For both Prophets, and Priests are profane, yea, in my House have I found their Wickedness, saith the LORD, I have seen also in the Prophets of Jerusalem an horrible Thing ; they commit Adultery and walk in Lies : They strengthen also the Hands of evil Doers, that none doth

dath return from his Wickedness : They
 are all of them unto me as SODOM and
 GOMORRAH : therefore, thus saith the
 LORD of HOSTS, concerning the Prophets.
 Behold ! I will feed them with Worm-
 wood and make them drink the Waters
 of Gall : For, from the Prophets of
 JERUSALEM, is Profaneness gone forth
 into all the Land. Again in EZEKIEL,
 Because, with Lies ye have made the
 Heart of the Righteous sad, whom I have
 not made sad, and strengthened the Hands
 of the Wicked, that he should not return
 from his wicked Way, by promising him
 Life : Therefore, ye shall see no more
 Vanity, or divine Divinations : For I
 will deliver my People out of your Hand,
 and ye shall know that I am the Lord.
 Again. Thus saith the LORD GOD unto
 the Shepherds wo be to the Shepherds of
 ISRAEL that do feed themselves ! Should
 not the Shepherds feed the Flocks ? Ye
 eat the Fat, and ye clothe ye with the
 Wool ; ye kill them that are fed ; but ye
 feed not the Flock. Therefore, O ye Shep-
 herds !

herds! bear the Word of the LORD !
 Thus saith the LORD GOD, behold I am
 against the Shepherds, and I will require
 my Flock at their Hand, and cause them
 to cease from feeding the Flock, neither
 shall the Shepherds feed themselves any
 more; for I will deliver my Flock from
 their Mouth, that they may not be Meat
 for them. In short, Gentlemen, there
 is no End of Quotations of this Nature ;
 but, as I was before observing, tho' they
 uniformly speak of the Restoration of
 their Kings, they seldom or ever qualify
 this exceeding Bitterness of theirs, with
 even a conditional Promise of equal
 Grace to the Priests——'Tis true *Eze-*
kiel introduces, by way of Vision, an
 Angel preparing the Model of a new
 Temple in a new City, and God him-
 self appointing how he will be worship-
 ped in it: But, as it does not appear
 that this Design ever took Place in
 Reality, we are under a Necessity of sup-
 posing God to be so provoked at their
 obstinate Perverseness, that he repented
 of

of his intended Favour; and left them the bare Plan only, to continue as a Memorial of their Unworthiness through all Generations.

Thus, Gentlemen, one would think it might be concluded from the Authority of *God* himself, that he was tired, and not without great Reason, of his first appointed Priesthood; and that, in the Old Testament, at least, he never, in Earnest, nominated any other to succeed them. But, this Difficulty, however great it may appear to secular Eyes, serves only to illustrate the Ingenuity of Ecclesiastics: For, by the Contents they have annexed to the Chapters of these way-ward Prophets and the running Heads on Top of the Columns, it seems that the Words *Jacob* and *Israel*, whenever any Promises of worldly Pomp, Wealth and Greatness are annexed to them, mean the CHURCH; and that 'tis only our Lay-Ignorance make us wonder that they were never yet fulfilled in Favour of the *Jews*, to whom only they seem to be

be addressed: But, with this Clue, all Perplexities are removed at once; and we are no longer at a Loss to account for the Ambition or Avarice of our ghostly Fathers; or to reconcile Prophecy, and Fact in these, and such like mysterious Texts. *Ob thou afflicted, says ISAIAH, tossed with Tempests, and not comforted; behold, I will lay thy Stones with fair Colours, and lay thy Foundations with Sapphires: And I will make thy Windows with Agate, and thy Gates of Carbuncles, and all thy Borders with pleasant Stones--* I was going on smoothly with my Quotation, Gentlemen, as a Truth not to be disputed, when the very next Verses seem to knock all on the Head again; and to manifest very clearly, that Orthodoxy itself is liable to Mistakes—The rest of the Passage runs thus—*And all thy Children shall be taught of the LORD, and great shall be the Peace of thy Children. In Righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from Oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and*

and from Terror, for it shall not come near thee—— Now, Gentlemen, if this Passage really refers to the Church how could it ever be in Danger as we have been often assured it has, by some of its most celebrated Advocates? How could it be far from Oppression, when some People say Oppression and the Church have been inseparable Companions? How could it be established in Righteousness, when the same Persons undertake to prove it was founded on Rapine and Corruption? Or how can its Children be said to be in Peace, when 'tis that constant Practice to bite and worry one another, and *Jesus* himself is pleased to declare, *He came not to bring Peace, but a Sword?*

However, to pass over these idle Cavils, let us proceed with their dextrous Way of unriddling Prophecies—*Arise!* says the same Prophet, *Shine, for the Light is come, and the Glory of the LORD is risen upon thee! And the GENTILES*

F

shall

*shall come to thy Light, and Kings to
 the Brightness of thy Rising. Lift up
 thine Eyes round about and see all that
 gather themselves together——The Mul-
 titude of Camels shall cover thee; the
 Dromedaries of MIDIAN and EPHAH:
 All they from SHEBA, they shall bring
 Gold and Incense, and they shall shew
 forth the Praises of the LORD. All the
 Flocks of KEDAR shall be gathered to-
 gether unto thee, the Rams of NEBAIOTH
 shall minister unto thee; they shall come
 up with Acceptance on mine Altar, and
 I will glorify the House of my Glory.
 Who are these that fly as a Cloud and
 as the Doves to their Windows? Surely
 the Isles shall wait for me and the Ships
 of TARSHISH first, to bring my Sons
 from far, their Silver and their Gold
 with them——And the Sons of Strangers,
 shall build up thy Walls, and their Kings
 shall minister unto thee——For the Nation
 and Kingdom, that will not serve thee,
 shall perish; yea, those Nations shall be
 utterly wasted——The Sons also of them
 that*

that afflict thee, shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee, shall bow themselves down at the Soles of thy Feet—And Strangers shall stand and feed your Flocks and the Sons of the Aliens shall be your Plowmen and Vine-dressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD; Men shall call you the Ministers of our GOD: Ye shall eat the Riches of the GENTILES, and in their Glory shall you boast yourselves——Now, Gentlemen, tho' all this is expressly promised to the City of the LORD, the ZION of the Holy one of Israel, ought we to question the Fidelity of those who interpret it the Church; especially, since the same venerable Personages made the same happy Discovery in the amorous Dialogue between Solomon and his Mistress? Nay, is it not carrying two capital Points with one Expedient? Making a handsome, tho' necessary Provision for the Church, and saving *Isaiab's* Credit at the same time? For it can never be said that any of these liberal Promises have been as yet made good to the Jews,

who were immediately concerned in them; and, on the other Hand, the Church, which the Prophets did not seem to dream of, has enjoyed them all, with many other pretty Perquisites into the Bargain: Allowing then this Hypothesis, Gentlemen, to be true, there is no Proportion of Wealth, Pomp, Power and Grandeur that the reverend Priesthood may not justly pretend to; nor any Slavery, Oppression, or Wretchedness that we Laymen ought not tamely to submit to——But, perhaps you will insist on a clearer Title on their Side, and a more explicit Command to Obedience on ours——Alas! If the whole People of these Kingdoms were so rigorously exact, what would become of all those innumerable Claims to enjoy and Canons to compel, that fill up our ecclesiastic Libraries? Believe me, Gentlemen, our Scruples would be too severe; we should ask what perhaps could not be complied with; and worst of all, as a fatal Consequence of our
churlish

churlish Curiosity, 'tis odds but the whole *Babel* of sacerdotal Pride, Covetousness and Luxury would fall to the Ground at once, and hardly remain its own monumental Ruin.

As, therefore, these subtle Refinements and quaint Glosses, are the best Authorities they have to produce, we ought at least to acknowledge their Prudence in endeavouring to perplex, rather than explain : A sorry Tenure is preferable to none, and if they can conceal the Weakness of theirs in the artful Obscurity of impenetrable Mysteries, tho' they cannot prove it to be genuine, 'twill be the more difficult for us to prove it counterfeit.

But, tho' we do Justice to their Prudence, 'tis our Duty to guard against their Fraud ; and Promises in the Mouth of a *Jewish* Prophet will give but a miserable Sanction to the Pretensions of a *Christian* Bishop — If then the old
Levitical

Levitical Priesthood was abolished, together with the Ceremonial of *Moses*, on which it was founded, by the coming of *Christ*, and any new Institution was to take Place in its Stead, *Christ* himself must have established it as particularly and circumstantially as the Nature of so important a Point deserved. The Errors, Abuses and Corruptions of the old must have been clearly manifested, in Order to set forth the Expediency and Necessity of the New; And, as the Experience of past Times had fatally demonstrated how liable Laws of every Kind were to degenerate from their original Purity; a System so explicit and harmonious, so uniform and exact, so intelligible, and useful in the Whole, and every Part must have been laid down, that the most ignorant could not have been mistaken, or the most artful adulterate; that even Power could not destroy, nor Time itself render obsolete— This, I say, Gentlemen, must have been expected both from the Nature of Things,

and the divine Character of the *Messiah*: I may even venture to affirm 'twas due to the World and the Welfare of Mankind: In particular it was due to the *Gentiles*, to whom now, for the first time, a Door was opened to the Throne of Grace: as they could not pretend to any of *Abraham's* Merit, or to any Share of the Promises made to his Children; so neither were they, or could they, be under any Obligation to fulfil the Conditions of a Covenant in which they were no Parties.

When, therefore, they were to be converted to *Christianity*, and, in return, were to admit of so many new Lords, and to maintain them at so vast an Expence of their Property, nothing was more reasonable than that the most unexceptionable Vouchers should have been forthcoming to authorize such unprecedented Claims, as were to be made the very Conditions of their future Happiness.

All

All this being indisputable, Gentlemen, and that (considering the Intention of the Gospels and thro' what honest Hands they have passed) 'tis not to be presumed they have lost any Proofs of this Nature by the Way, we must next refer to them for proper Lights into this mysterious Affair: And proper Lights, no Doubt, we shall find; for surely 'tis not possible that so many Nations, for so many Ages together, should be led away with holy Delusions; or, if better informed, should submit to a more contemptible Vassalage than that of a fond Lover to a jilting Mistress; a Vassalage to the worst of Impostors; who abuse the Credulity of the Weak and Superstitious, to enslave the Knowing and Wise; and father their venerable Frauds and Oppressions on the beneficent God, they have the impudent Hypocrisy to affront with their perjured Adorations.

In

In the first Place then, Gentlemen, we find *Jesus* at first expressly declaring, *I am not sent but unto the lost Sheep of ISRAEL.* Again to his Apostles, *Go not into the Way of the GENTILES! But go rather to the lost Sheep of the House of ISRAEL.* Again, *Think not I come to destroy the Law and the Prophets! I am come not to destroy but fulfil:* And how they were to be fulfilled, appears plainly from this very explicit Passage of *JEREMIAH,* *For thus saith the LORD, DAVID shall never want a Man to sit upon the Throne of the House of ISRAEL: neither shall the Priests or the LEVITES want a Man before me to offer burnt Offerings and to kindle Meat-Offerings, and to do Sacrifice continually.* Adding yet farther this strong Image to make the Promise more solemn and binding—*Thus said the LORD; If my Covenant be not with Day and Night, and if I have not appointed the Ordinances of Heaven and Earth, then will I cast away*
G the

the Seed of JACOB and DAVID my Servants, so that I will not take any of his Seed to be Rulers over the Seed of ABRAHAM, ISAAC and JACOB. For I will cause their Captivity to return, and will have Mercy on them.

To fulfil, therefore, the Law and the Prophets must be understood to complete them in every Circumstance; and, as these were the principal Points on which the *Jews* depended for a Manifestation of the divine Goodness to them, preferable to all other Nations, the *Messiah* could not avoid premising to his Disciples. *The SCRIBES and PHARISEES set in MOSES's Seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe, and do!* So far is he as yet from abolishing their Authority, or setting up that of his Apostles above them, that he peremptorily enjoins the strictest Obedience to them! - Moreover, having cleansed the Leper; *Go!* says he, *and shew thyself to the Priests, and offer for thy*

thy Cleansing as MOSES commanded! Nay so high a Veneration he pays the established Religion of his Country, that, in the Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*, he makes *Abraham* declare, *That if they bear not MOSES and the Prophets neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Head:* In fine, as he perceived Devotion to be lost in Superstition and Ceremony reigning in lieu of Morality, thro' the Knavery of Priests and Proctors, he labours principally to make these intruding Idols again give Place to the real Divinity; or, in other Words, to turn Hypocrisy into Virtue. Hence we find that he himself punctually complied with the very Letter of the Law of *Moses*, being first circumcised as the Seal of the original Covenant, and celebrating all the stated Festivals of it with his Disciples, in common with the rest of the *Jews*: Inveigh he often does against the absurd Innovations of those licenced Deceivers the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; such as their ostentatious Garb, their verbose Prayers,

their affected Fasts, and, above all, their dispensing with the moral Precepts of the Law for a Bribe: as in that infamous Case, where a Man, devoting to the Temple what he was obliged to allow for the Support of his superannuated Parents, was absolved from any farther Care of them; and they were left to starve that the Sanctuary might be enriched; I say, Gentlemen, these and such like Corruptions he inveighs against frequently and with great Bitterness; but seldom or never against the Institution on which they were superinduced: striving always to restore it to its pristine Purity; or rather refine upon it, by inculcating that the Commandments of *God* were rendred vain by the Traditions of Men; he delighting in Mercy, not in Sacrifice——But when he found his Countrymen still as stupid and sensual as when they set up in the Wilderness that sympathetic Godling after whose Image they were made; and with Hearts so gross, and Heads so hard, that 'twas, in a
Manner

Manner, impossible to make them apprehend, or relish Truth in the Abstract, stript of the Pomp and Gold wherewith *Moses* had most sagaciously adorned it, then and not till then he declares to these Insensibles. *The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof*——Now, Gentlemen, with the Loss of the Kingdom, that of the Priesthood must necessarily follow, as is manifest from Facts as well as the Nature of its Constitutions none of the *Jews* at this Day being able to *prove* their Descent from *Levi*, even the precious Ark, tho' guarded by God himself, being lost, and the Service of their Altar having been for Ages totally laid aside.

But tho' a new Kingdom is promised, not one Syllable is dropt of a new Priesthood; neither is any such Office of a Piece with his Doctrines, or even consistent with his express Declarations. *Come unto me, says he, all ye that are heavy.*

heavy laden, and I will give you Rest. Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart, and ye shall find Rest for your Souls. For my Yoke is easy and my Burden light. What is this but to say, Come to me for Deliverance from the Pride and Impositions of your Priests! My Precepts are not calculated like theirs to enslave you; and I am too humble to be like them, a Tyrant: And agreeable to this Interpretation is the whole Current of his Life and Conversation; in the one exposing their arrogant, merciless Dispositions, and in the other, disclaiming their rigorous and usurped Authority: As is evident in his pointed Parable, of the proud *Pharisee*; and that of the hard-hearted *Priest* and *Levite*, who, without one pitying Look, passed by the wounded Wretch, that the good *Samaritan* afterwards relieved. If then he was so declared an Enemy to the reverend Dogmatists of those Times, is it possible that he should have any Thoughts of per-

perpetuating their Oppressions among those that he called to Truth and Liberty? No certainly ; he could not be more ignorant than our own Poet, who asserts so undeniably, *That Priests of all Religions are the same* ; and therefore could never intend to trust his Flock to the Care of those very Wolves, of whom he so pathetically warns them to beware.

But, to be more particular—— There is not only in the Gospel no Institution of a new Priesthood, but almost every Engine of Power, which our modern *Levites* have thought proper to assume by their own Authority since, is, in the most clear and explicit Manner, guarded against ; In Point of Wealth and worldly Possessions he declares, *Whoever he be of you who forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple*. With Respect to Titles, *But be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master even Christ, and all ye are Brethren, and call no Man Father*

ther on Earth, for one is your Father who is in Heaven. Likewise with Respect to pompous Epithets annexed to those Titles—Why callest thou me Good? There is none good but one, that is God. Again referring to Power and Authority, Ye know that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise Dominion over them, and they that are great exercise Authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you let him be your Minister: And whosoever will be Chief among you, let him be your Servant. Can any Words be more express? And if there is any Set of Men in the World, who call themselves his Successors, and violate those Injunctions, in the most open and profligate Manner, are not they more notorious Impostors than even Mahamet himself?

But, not to confine ourselves to his Precepts only, let us refer to that more indisputable Test, the strict Agreement

ment and Conformity of his Actions. Accordingly we find him so far from changing a luxurious Support by divine Right, that he subsists wholly on Providence, without a Penny to pay Tribute, or a Hole to lay his Head; so far from Pride that he eats with Publicans and Sinners, chuses Fishermen for his Friends and Companions, and, in the Excess of Humility; washes their Feet, as a Type of the Services each indifferently owed to his Brethren; So far from a sanguinary Thirst of Vengeance, that, when a *Samaritan* Village refused to entertain him, and his testy Apostles were for calling down Fire from Heaven, in Imitation of *Elias*, he calmly replies, *Ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Men is not come to destroy Men's Lives but to save them:* And so far from confining his Ministry to any peculiar Set of Men whatever, that, when *John* said to him, *Master! We saw one casting out Devils in thy Name, and we forbid him because he*
H *followed*

followed not with us : He returns, Forbid him not ! for he that is not against us is for us : And then as to the Exercise of Power and Authority, either in Temporals or Spiritualls, two stronger Instances that his Ministry had nothing to do with either, cannot be given, than his Behaviour to the Man who applied to him for a Share in his Brother's Inheritance, and in the Case of the Woman taken in Adultery. To the last, by declaring, If no Man hath condemned thee, neither do I condemn thee : And to the first, by demanding, Who made me a Judge, or a Diviaer, over you ?

If then *Jesus* himself made no one Step towards assuming the priestly Character, nor would accept of any temporal Power, or be distinguished by any worldly Titles, nor possess any Property, or delegate any Privileges of this Nature to his Followers, what infinite Presumption is it for those who are a Disgrace to his Name, to fasten their

Harpy-Talons on *Aaron's* Mitre, and the whole Apparatus of Pontifical Pride belonging to it, as their proper Inheritance? Are not these to be justly esteemed of that hypocritical Number, who would claim an Interest in him at his promised Return; with a *Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in thy Name? &c.* But to whom he will reply, I never knew you, *Depart from me ye that work Iniquity!*

You have now, Gentlemen, seen it, I think, fully and clearly explained, that, when there was a Priesthood of a divine Appointment, it was subject to the civil Magistrate; and that, when its Measure of Iniquity was full, by divine Justice on those reverend Oppressors, and divine Commiseration to the Oppressed, it was utterly abrogated, without so much as the remotest Hint of a new one to be established in its stead: It remains at present, therefore, only to examine the Nature of those Commissions given by *Christ* to his Disciples; on which, rapacious and design-

ing Prelates have founded such a vast Super-structure of Avarice, Pride and Cruelty, in spite of those flagrant Proofs that, at every Step, rise up in Evidence against them.

The first of these Commissions to the Twelve, and the second to the Seventy, were delivered before his Crucifixion, running in simular Terms, and bestowing simular Powers: *Preach the Kingdom of Heaven! heal the Sick! cleanse the Leper! cast out Devils! provide neither Staff nor Purse! Eat where ye preach! And where ye are not received, shake off the Dust off your Feet as a Testimony against them!* But, as hinted before, they were limited in these to the Jews only. After the Resurrection, a third follows, wherein their Circuit is enlarged. *Teach and baptize all Nations!* and Paul, as a chosen Vessel, is honoured with a Fourth. *To bear his Name before the Gentiles, and the Children of Israel.* But none of these include any Promise to enrich them with the

the Spoils of the Altar, or exalt them on the Ruins of LEVI; much less authorise these to whom they were given, to command what Share of the Property of the *Gentiles* they pleased, to claim Equality with Kings, or arrogate Titles, Powers and Dignities; which were absolutely contrary to, and inconsistent with every one of the Gospel-Precepts.

But the *Prerogative of the Keys* is the grand Trust, the mighty Instance of a delegated Superiority——What? To make a Turnpike of the Gates of Heaven and admit or exclude only as the Fees were refused or paid? No, surely: God never trusted the Passions of any Set of Men whatever with the Power of saving, or damning their Fellow-Creatures on such mercenary Terms: 'Tis an Affront to his Wisdom, as well as his Justice and Goodness; and if we should allow this important Passage to be genuine in Respect to the Saintship of *Peter*, to whom it is said to be more peculiarly addressed

addressed, it will require a World of Credulity to suppose it continued to his imaginary Successors. Nay the ingenious Mr. Hales of Eaton in his Tract on the Power of the Keys, makes no Scruple to confine it to the Apostles only: Humourously enquiring, whether, when a Man, immediately on his Conversion to Christianity, falls into any mortal Sin, the Gate of Heaven stands open to him, till he falls upon some cursed Priest, that used his Key to shut it? And, afterwards, compares the Priests acting in Conjunction with God, and the opening it again upon his Reconciliation, to the Fraud of a deceitful Smith, Who, the better to countenance and grace his Work, adds to his Key superfluous and idle Wards, which in the opening of the Lock are of no Use at all.

But, Gentlemen, the better to understand these Commissions, particularly the Last, 'tis necessary we should cast our Eyes on the uniform Tenure of them
all

all: And this was *Faith*, which the *Messiah* every where magnifies, as the Source of all Virtue in the Agent and of Success in the Patient. *Thy Faith hath made thee whole. Lord I believe, help then my Unbelief! I have not found so great Faith, no not in Israel. And he did no mighty Things there, because of their Unbelief.* Again, when his Disciples had failed in casting out a Devil, and enquire of their Master the Cause, he instantly replies, *Because of your Unbelief; and adds, Verily I say unto you, if ye have Faith as a Grain of Mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this Mountain, remove to yonder Place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you.*

Nor is this miraculous Power of Faith confined to the Apostles only; for, after his Resurrection, he expressly declares. *That whoever believes shall cast out Devils in his Name, shall speak with new Tongues, take up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly Thing, it shall not hurt them.*

them. They shall lay Hands on the Sick and they shall recover. And Peter, when this is verified by the Descent of the Holy Ghost, confirms the like Graces to all Believers. Repent, says he, and be baptised every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the Remission of Sins, and ye shall receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost. For the Promise is unto you, and to your Children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Not one Reserve, you see, Gentlemen, in Favour of Curates, Vicars, Rectors, Canons, Prebends, Arch-Deacons, Bishops, Metropolitans of a Kingdom, and Metropolitans of all the Kingdom, Patriarchs, Popes and all the other pageant Titularies of ecclesiastic Greatness—

Is it not plain then, that this monopolizing the *Power of the Keys*, is but a Church-Artifice to make that infamous Distinction between the Clergy and Laity, which is neither warranted by Reason

or

or Scripture ; and to subjugate one as Slaves and aggradandize the other into Tyrants ? And is it not as plain, that, as the primitive Christians were all Believers alike and consequently received a like Portion of the *Holy Spirit*, so we Modern are all alike Unbelievers, whatever we profess, and, of Course, cannot prove one Article of our Faith by our Works, any more than our spiritual Guides can manifest their Tongues to be cleft by the *Holy Ghost* ?

But, not to be thought severe, or uncharitable, Gentlemen, tho' I must own it appears to me a very odd Thing, that the Porter of the Gate of Heaven should have his Residence on Earth, as a superiour Degree of Faith is apparently the only Title to that egregious Office, let the Candidates for it, or Inheritors of it, be put to the Proof ! Let them pleasure us with any Sample, though ever so small, that they are really qualify'd for so high a Trust ! We will not insist on their removing Mountains, or

I

their

their curing the Sick, or casting out of Devils. Let them only exercise their wonder-working Power on their own Hearts and demonstrate them to be like *Natbaniel's* without Guile, and it shall be preferred to a more ostentatious, tho' less useful Miracle !

But 'tis greatly to be feared that, like the *Cardinal*, their Predecessor, in the Play, *they'll die and make no Sign*: Whereas, if they were sent by *Jesus*, as he was by the *Father*, as they apply the Text, *not only the Works that he did should they do also, but greater Works than those*, if his own Evidence is to be depended upon, as 'tis recorded by his beloved Disciple.

Finally, Gentlemen, as it appears by a great Variety of Texts, such as, *The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand, this Generation shall not pass away till all these Things are fulfilled. But I tell you of a Truth there be some standing here who shall not taste of Death, till they see the Kingdom of God. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught*,

taught up together with them in the Clouds to meet the Lord in the Air. But now, once in the End of the World, hath he appeared to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself. I say, Gentlemen, it appears by these, and many other Passages of the like Nature, that the World was then understood to be near its Dissolution; consequently there would be no farther Necessity of Priests or Altars: The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews therefore (whoever he was) not only observes that the Priesthood was changed; but that Jesus having assumed it himself by making a Sacrifice of his own Person on the Cross, assumed it once for all. For by one Offering, says he, he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. 'Tis plain then he could have no Successor and needed no Deputies or Assistants; having closed the bloody Scene, and laid down his own Life to free Mankind from all ecclesiastic Tyranny for the Time to come. But, alas! Gentlemen, Fraud, Avarice, Pride and Oppression have still rendred

the *Grace of God of none Effect*, and many noble Nations, tho' visited by the Light of Truth, are still fettered with a worse than *Levitical Yoke of Bondage*.

Now that those who live by this Craft should fly in the Face of Conviction, pervert the Gospel they preach, and have recourse to any Artifice, or promote any Violence to enlarge, or secure their preposterous Dominion and hell-begot Exactions, who wonders? But that those who are pressed down to the Earth, both in Body and Soul, with their insupportable Burthens, should tamely submit to the Load, nay treat their Deliverers with a Resentment blind and bloody as the Zeal that inspires it, is what can never be sufficiently admired at——Yet, such is the Prejudice of a bigotted Education, and such the stupid Awe that the impudent Formalities of some Men have stamped on weak and narrow Minds, that even Lawn-Sleeves, starched Bands, pharisaical Robes and hypocritical Faces are made the Types

of Deity, and not to be approached without Fear and Trembling.

To remove this Awe and ridicule this Prejudice, is to violate the Ark with your unhallowed Hands, and they are amazed at the Patience of God, that you are not struck dead like *Uzzab* for the impious Trespass——In vain we have recourse to Scripture for Justification; tho' we are enjoined to read, we are not to presume to interpret; and, tho' we are plainly told that, under the New Covenant, *They shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, saying, Know the Lord! for all should know me from the Least to the Greatest,* yet will they esteem it little less than Blasphemy, to allow it any Weight, notwithstanding God himself is the Speaker.

But these Difficulties and Discouragements, Gentlemen, shall not deter us from our laudable Pursuit of Truth and Liberty: The Attempt is so seasonable and necessary, that, if my Weakness should

should sink under it, those of better Abilities should immediately arise, to carry it on in my Room——'Tis not alone the Attempts of the *Codex* we have to fear; the Emiffaries of *Rome* are again indefatigably busy and fatally successful——War! War then with Superstition and Tyranny, those inseparable Concomitants! must be incessantly wag'd till Common-Sense is brought into Common-Use, and Men dare to be free as they were born.

I shall conclude as I began, Gentlemen, with a noble Passage from that Glory of his Age and Nation, immortal *Milton*, which I beg Leave to recommend to your serious Consideration.

The Emulation, that, under the old Law, was in the King towards the Priests, is now so come about in the Gospel, that all the Danger is to be feared from the Priest to the King. While the Priest's Office in the Law, was set out with an exterior Lustre of Pomp and Glory, Kings were ambitious to be Priests;

Priests; now Priests, not perceiving the
 heavenly Brightness and inward Splendor
 of their more glorious and Evangelic
 Ministry, with as great Ambition, affect
 to be Kings; as in all their Courses is
 easy to be observed. Their Eyes are
 imminent upon worldly Matters, their De-
 sires ever thirsting after worldly Employ-
 ments; instead of diligent and fervent
 Study of the Bible, they covet to be ex-
 pert in Canons and Decretals, which may
 enable them to judge and interpose in
 temporal Causes, however pretended Ec-
 clesiastical. Do they not board up Pelf?
 seek to be potent in secular Strength, in
 State-Affairs, in Lands, Lordships and
 Demesns, to sway and carry all before
 them in High-Courts and Privy-Councils,
 to bring into their Grasp the high and
 principal Offices of the Kingdom? Have
 they not been bold of late to check the
 Common-Law, to slight and brave the
 indiminishable Majesty of our highest Court,
 the Law-giving and sacred Parliament?
 Do they not plainly labour to exempt
 Churchmen

Churchmen from the Magistrate? Yea so presumptuously, as to question, and menace Officers that represent the King's Person, for using their Authority against drunken Priests? The Cause of protecting murderous Clergymen was the first Heart-burning that swelled up the audacious Becket to the pestilent and odious Vexation of Henry II. Nay more, have not some of their devoted Scholars begun, I need not say to nibble, but openly to argue against the King's Supremacy? Is not the Chief of them accused out of his own late Book, and his late Canons, to affect a certain unquestionable Patriarchate, independent and insubordinate to the Crown? From whence, Gentlemen, he goes on to insinuate, that, in time, he might have the Insolence to aspire yet higher still; and, as by Tyranny of Custom, he had set on his Master's Crown, plead the Authority of his Brother *Anti-christ* at Rome to take it off.



The Ax laid to the Root
O F
CHRISTIAN PRIESTCRAFT.
In FOUR DISCOURSES.

By a LAYMAN.

DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE
MEANS *taken by* PRIESTS to
fix their YOKE.

*Is not the Care of Souls a Load sufficient?
Are not your holy Stipends paid for this?
Were you not bred apart from worldly Noise
To study Souls, their Cures and their Diseases?
The Province of the Soul is large enough
To fill up ev'ry Cranny of your Time,
And leave you much to answer, if one Wretch
Be damn'd by your Neglect.
Why then these foreign Rights of State-Employments,
Abhorrent to your Function and your Breeding.*

DRYDEN.

*Make not the Church to us an Instrument
Of Bondage, to yourselves of Liberty!*

LORD BROOK.

L O N D O N:

Printed for T. COOPER, at the Globe in Pater-noster-
Row. MDCCXLII.

(Price One Shilling.)

43

4

6

54





DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE
MEANS *taken by* PRIESTS to
fix their YOKE.

GENTLEMEN,



THE holy Apostle and Evangelist Saint John is pleased to declare, *That if all the Things which Jesus did were to be written every one, even the World itself could not contain the Books that should be written.* Now what is apparently an Hyperbole in Relation to the *Messiah*,

ouluq B would

would be little less than literal Truth, in Relation to the Impostures, Cruelties and Ufurpations of those, who have impudently lorded it over the Souls and Bodies of their Fellow-creatures by a pretended Deputation from him. To this Redundance of Matter then is to be ascribed our dwelling so long in the Pourlieus of our Undertaking; and 'tis with no small Difficulty, that any Thing like Method is to be observed in unravelling the artful Perplexities, wherewith every Step of their mischievous Story is entangled—What the learned *Mascow* exclaims in his History of the *Germans*, being strictly applicable to theirs. *That History is, as it were, fatigued amidst these Disorders, where Ambition is the Cause of such Effusion of Blood!* However, with *Plato*, towards the close of a voluminous Book, we may now cry out *Land!* In our last, to clear the Way in the most effectual Manner possible, we traced the Claims of the Priesthood from *Moses* to the Death of *Christ*; and in this we shall

pursue the same Thread, till *Rome* becomes the Mart of Ceremonies, as *Jerusalem* was of old: Remarking as we go, by what Designs and Accidents, Frauds and Violences, the vast but wicked Project was completed.

'Tis observable, Gentlemen, that the first Promise of *Jesus* to his Disciples, *Follow me, and I will make you FISHERS of MEN!* seems to be regarded by the Ecclesiasties, in the same Light with the *promised Land*, by the *Israelites*: On this their Eyes are steadfastly fixed; to this they journey perpetually: Hither their Cloud and Fire direct them; every Stop or Delay excites their Murmurs, and there is no Villany so great that they have not waded thro' to possess it—Nor is this to be wondered at: Milk and Honey, or, in modern Language, Wine and Tobacco are the Motives to the one, as well as the other; nor could the gross-minded *Jews* (whose very Revelation was accommodated to their bru-

tal Appetites) be more fond of sensual Enjoyments than they ——— Even the very *Apostles* themselves, with all due Reverence be it spoken, could not help giving way to Hopes and Views of this Nature ; as is manifest from their Quarrels for Precedency ; nor could the public Death of their Lord and Master so far restore them to their Reason, but that, even after the Resurrection, their very first Question is, *Lord! will thou, at this Time, restore again the Kingdom to Israel?* As if, till Men were, in the Gospel-Sense, born again, or really and indeed replenished with the *Holy Ghost*, it was impossible for them to be initiated in Spirituals, without expecting a Temporal Reward ——— 'Tis true, they are soon convinced they had mistaken their Calling ; and, instead of *sitting on twelve Thrones, judging the twelve Tribes of Israel* in this World, as they fondly imagined, find themselves appointed only to be Witnesses of the *Messiah* in *Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the uttermost Parts of the Earth* : under which last Words no Doubt

Doubt the mighty Continent of *America*, (as containing so many Millions of humane Savages, who stood in such obvious Need of a divine Revelation) was included; tho' the inspired Writers did not think it worthy of Notice in their spiritual Map; and the Corruptions of Time have since worn out all Traces of their pious Endeavours, both there and in the vast Regions of *Africa* likewise.

But to proceed. Immediately from the Ascension, Gentlemen, according to the Stile of our ghostly Fathers, we are to date the Origin of the Christian Church: tho' the Word itself does not occur in the History of the *Apostles*, till after the Descent of the *Holy Ghost*. In which Interval, as if to testify that Ordination might be valid by the Votes of the People only, without the immediate Interposition of Heaven, *Matthias* is elected instead of *Judas*, to keep up the Number of the *Apostles*, in Compliment to the twelve Tribes of *Israel*. Yes, Gentlemen, *Matthias* is chosen

chosen by *Lot*, and the *Holy Ghost* does not descend till some Time after; neither is he chosen by the *Apostles* only, but by the Disciples in general, whom we are told by the Text amounted to one Hundred and twenty Persons——

This, therefore, is to be reputed the first Institution of ecclesiastical Precedency, since, by the same Act that the People elected a new *Apostle*, they recognize the Authority of the rest. For while *Jesus* lived they were barely his Disciples; but being now become stated Witnesses of his Mission, Doctrine and Miracles, there was a Necessity they should be received as such, by those who already believed, as an additional Sanction to the rest of the World——

And one would think this Opportunity of electing an *Apostle* was purposely left by the *Messiah*, for an eternal Precedent to the People of their Right to chuse for themselves in spiritual, as well as temporal Affairs; since nothing was more easy than for him to have appoint-

ed

ed a Successor to *Jesus* himself, especially as 'tis said he conversed so often with his Disciples between his Resurrection and his Ascent to Heaven. But on the contrary, he never so much as names the Necessity of any such supplemental Evidence; but, having earnestly recommended the Propagation of his Faith, leaves the Means of establishing it wholly to the Believer's Discretion. Beside, what was this new *Apostle* elected to? any temporal Power and Authority? No certainly; that would have been High-Treason against the State to which they belonged, nor could a handful of inconsiderable People equitably detach themselves from the Laws of that State, much less rise up in Opposition to them, and delegate any Part of their own illegal Faction to controul and govern the Rest. — If therefore the *Apostles* themselves had no such temporal Power and Authority, 'tis impossible they should bequeath it to their Successors; and, tho' we should allow the

the Series of them to be ever so free from Chasm or Flaw, or ever so duly and methodically appointed, they can derive no more than spiritual Gifts and Graces from a spiritual Commission; of which likewise, as was observed in our last, they would do very well to give us now and then a Specimen.

But the *Apostles*, Gentlemen, no where pretend to have received any such worldly Deputation; on the contrary, when the Zeal of the new Converts impelled them to sell their Estates, and make one common Purse for the Support of the Brotherhood, a spontaneous Act of Charity, the Result of their own Benevolence, not the necessary Effects of a coercive Law! they are so far from arrogating any Power, even from being entrusted with the whole Property of the Community, that they even decline all Concern in the Distribution; nay, call upon the Brethren to elect peculiar Officers for that Purpose; as a temporal Affair, which

which would interfere with their own immediate Employ—According to the Text before quoted. *But we will give ourselves continually to Prayer, and to the Ministry of the Word:* Which is, in the most explicit Manner laying down the Limits of the clerical, or if you please the episcopal Function; and, if nothing will serve our modern Zealots but an Apostolical Commission, nothing seems more reasonable than to confine it to its original Bounds.

But this, Gentlemen, would not answer their ambitious Ends. If nothing but unprofitable Sanctity was conveyed thro' the holy Channel of uninterrupted Episcopacy, it had never been controverted on one Hand, or so eagerly, tho' ridiculously defended on the other. No, they had far different Prospects; Scripture-Authorities afforded no Sanction to their encroaching Claims; and, as soon as they were touched by spiritual Loadstone of Consecration, they assumed a

C

discretionary

discretionary Power, First, to write Laws, then interpret, and afterwards tack to them what seasonable Supplement would suit best with the growing Demands of their insatiable Appetites—What else is the whole Mystery of Church-Government? And what else are those innumerable Innovations which have rent Christianity into such Shreds and Fritters, that 'tis hard to distinguish, by any one of their Patterns, the Substance of the original Piece.

'Tis certain, *Jesus*, who ought to be supposed the best Judge of his own Design, never so much as mentions a Church of his own raising; consequently could neither lay down any Scheme of ecclesiastic Discipline himself, or recommend any such Establishment to his Disciples: Now, if 'twas of half the Consequence to the Good of Mankind, that our reverend Directors would have it supposed, 'tis not to be presumed that he would have carelessly left it to Time, Chance and the

the turbulent Passions of mercenary Priests to model at Discretion : No, certainly, such a Neglect would then have left Infidels large Room to reflect on his Wisdom or Honesty : And, considering the infinitely tragic Effects which result from it, and that it was really a Debt to the World in general, as well as his Followers in particular, it would have been no easy Matter to obviate their Censures—But the very Fact itself sufficiently demonstrates that he thought it a Trifle beneath his Notice ; or otherwise he that taught the Life of every Sparrow was registered, nay the Hairs of the Head were numbered, would have surpassed *Moses* himself in the Exactness of an Institution, on which the Lives and Fortunes of so many Millions and Millions yet unborn depended.

But not to dwell any longer on this Head ; it has been already proved he came to abolish needless Ceremonies and cruel Exactions : Of Course could

not so flagrantly contradict himself, by obtruding a Yoke upon Mankind, infinitely more burdensome, mischievous and oppressive than any that preceded it——Supposing then, Gentlemen, we should allow the *Apostles*, as being filled with the *Holy Ghost*, to have a Power to propose Expedients of Church-Government, 'tis notorious from the Text itself, that Power of theirs was not arbitrary, but dependent on, and limited by the Will of the People: Thus an *Apostle* is elected, Deacons appointed, and Controversies are determined, not only in their Presence, but by their Authority; nay, they call *Peter* himself to Account for having sojourned with uncircumcised *Cornelius*; and tis not without the Help of a Vision that his Justification is allowed.

If, therefore, the *Apostles* themselves had no Power independant of, or superior to the few who had voluntarily submitted to be taught by them, what
an

an infinite Absurdity is it, for an aspiring Prelate to claim an absolute, divine Authority over the Consciences of a whole Nation, together with their Magistrates; or contend for a selfish Dominion, which is diametrically opposite to human Law, natural Reason and divine Revelation? At this Rate the apostolic Virtue, instead of gradually diminishing, as it removed from its Fountain-Head, (as one would rationally imagine it would, especially as all the miraculous Sanctions bestowed on it at first, are now totally extinguished) must gradually increase; and, in a few Ages, these successive Evidences of the *Messiah's* Kingdom would have nothing to do but tyrannize in their own——Yes, Gentlemen, such would be the deplorable Condition of Mankind, if *God* had been so negligent of them, as to leave them wholly at the Mercy of their Priests——But, according to our excellent *Milton*, this is so far from being the Case, that Bounds are as plainly stated
against

against their Encroachments, as those of the turbulent Ocean——'Tis true his Proofs are too general, I speak it with great Deference, and his Quotations from *Paul's Charge to Timothy* and *Titus*, rather too inconclusive——For *Paul* had never been personally conversant with the *Messiah*, nor made it appear he received any legislative Authority from him, neither indeed do the Words of that very Charge imply any more than Advice——As I hinted before, therefore, the *Messiah's* own Doctrines are to be looked upon as the grand Standard both of Faith and Church-Oeconomy; and, next to his, the illuminated Regulations of those *Apostles*, who had been Eye-witnesses of his Life and Death, and yet who, by what appears from their History, imposed no one Ordinance without the Consent of the whole Assembly: If therefore, Church-Power has any thing like a divine Origin, this must be the only Model, and no Order of Men whatever has a Right to adulterate it, with

with any interested Innovations of their own : contrary, indeed, to this Assertion of *Milton's*, the learned Author of that excellent Book, *The Rights of the Christian Church*, maintains, that, granting the Institution positive, the Manner of it is undefined. But then he is so far from supposing the Power of regulating it to be left to any Set of Persons with an unalterable Right to manage it, that both Persons and Forms are, according to him, in the Power of the People, and may be varied or set aside, as appears most expedient for the public Good.

Perhaps, Gentlemen, it will be too arduous a Task for us to determine between these two great Authors; but this is certain, no Man or Body of Men was ever entrusted with Power for their own Sakes, but the Benefit of those who surrender'd their own natural Independency into their Hands for that End. Whether therefore, the Rulers of the Church are to be entrusted with their Superiority,
in

in Imitation of that of the Apostles, as a divine Institute, or from worldly Considerations, either way they are to receive it from the free Voice of the People ; and are bound to exercise it for the Good of the People ; as the only equitable Tenure either spiritual or temporal ; *Jesus* commanding *Peter* to feed his Sheep, not to fleece them ; and no Man in his Senses putting a Sword into another's Hand to assail, but to defend himself—Were we only, therefore, to prove that the Interest of the Church has, in all Ages, been the Ruin of the People's, or that their mitred Pastors have acted like the worst of Tyrants, it would be sufficient to vacate all their Titles at once, whether as the Successors of the *Apostles*, the Disciples of *Jesus*, or the Servants of the People.

But you would think it a grand Impertinence, Gentlemen, to take up your Time in vacating Titles that never had a Being. Successors of the *Apostles* they never

never could be, as having no wonder-working Credentials like theirs to produce from the Holy Ghost ; and quitting the Word of God to pollute themselves with the World : Disciples of *Jesus* they could not be as possessing neither Faith nor Humility, Grace nor Charity ; and Servants of the Peoples they could not be, since it has been their uniform Labour to plunder and spoil them worse than the *Israelites* did the *Egyptians*, ever since their aspiring, hypocritical Order had a Being.

We must then rather attack them as rapacious Thieves that have taken Possession of God's Fold by Violence ; or bold Seducers, who have misled the Flock by their Craft and Lies ; or profane Hirelings who followed them for Reward : No nearer a-kin to the *Apostles*, then by their Descent from *Judas Iscariot* ; or better qualified to receive the *Holy Ghost* than *Simon Magus*, who fancied like them that Money would purchase all

D Things :

Things : In a Word, we must attack them, as those who had turned the World upside down ; who had made Humility the Bawd of Pride, Self-denial of Sensuality, spiritual Promises of worldly Greatness, Truth of Falshood, and Liberty of Oppression : As those who, like the *Devil* himself, have extracted Evil out of Good, and who like roaring Lions are ever seeking what they may devour.

Nor is this an exaggerated Carracature, but a genuine Portrait ; there being no such Figure as an Hyperbole to be made use of on such a Subject — To what Purpose then would it be to make Enquires into their fantastical, uninterrupted Succession ? or even to explode the Traditionary Cheat ? If they had the Virtues, Gifts and Graces of their Principals, it would not be worth their while to value themselves on so ridiculous an Authority ; and as it is manifest they have not, for *God's* Sake what signifies

nifies it from whence they derive their nominal Holiness; which is rather a Satire than an Honour, and only serves to put us in Mind of the Essentials that are wanting to render their episcopal Pedigree complete?—However, Gentlemen, if you have any Curiosity to see this spiritual Juggle plainly detected, and the Vanity of its reverend Patrons effectually exposed, read the truly inspired *Milton*, on *Prelatical Episcopacy*; where you will find all the Authorities they have to urge in it's Support, to be as idle and legendary, as the Tale of the Seven Sleepers, which is gravely told by the very same Author, on whose Credit they endeavour to prove that *Timothy* was the first Bishop of *Ephesus*.

But to return. 'Tis not my Opinion singly, that if Church-Government is of divine Appointment, it ought to have been established to the minutest Point by divine Authority: the venerable Father *Paul* in his Treatise on the *Rights*

of Sovereigns, has the following similar Passage. *We dont find that the Apostles made any other Decrees, besides those containing the Precepts of Faith; though methinks it might have been thought necessary to establish by Decrees, the Authority of Prelates, the Limits of Obedience, Jurisdiction, and the like things; which were the more needful then, when this spiritual Dominion was first introduced—* But, alas! how should they ordain Decrees respecting Claims and Events which neither they, nor their Master ever thought of? 'Tis not to be supposed that poor and humble *Fishermen* ever dreamt of being Princes, Judges and Legislators; much less that any who claimed in their Right would presume to aspire to such pompous Dignities; *The Disciple is not greater than his Master, or the Servant than his Lord*, they might imagine was an insurmountable Bar to the Pride, or Avarice of their Successors; and, therefore, that either all farther Interdicts were superfluous, or that

that those who would not regard the *Messiah* himself, would not be held within Bounds by any Additional Restraint of theirs,

Here perhaps, Gentlemen, our bigotted or interested Adversaries, will object to us, certain Texts in *Paul's* Epistles which they have taught to favour the ambitious Claims of the Clergy, such as even that of the *Thessalonians*, *And we beseech you Brethren to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and in that to the Hebrews, Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your Souls. I say taught*, because Critics as great as those whose Translation we follow, give these Passages a different Turn ; and maintain that they mean no more than, *Be persuaded by your Guides ; and know your Leaders in the Lord : And that this is the Apostle's true Sense is manifest from the Style of the Apostle himself. First,*
by

by addressing his Epistle, not to these imaginary Dictators, but to the People. Secondly, by that exceeding plain Description of their Function, *who admonished you?* and, Thirdly, by his own gentle Phrase, *we beseech you Brethren*. If, therefore, *Paul*, an Apostle so signally chosen by *God* himself to the universal Ministry, does not command, but *beseech*, and talks to the *Thessalonians* as Brethren, not as Lay-Asses and Beasts of Burthen, created only to sweat beneath Church-Impositions, surely their Local-Elders, elected from among themselves, or invited from other Churches, could have no Title to exercise a Power, which he is too modest to assume, or even insinuate he has a Right to claim.

Moreover, Gentlemen, no Priest will have the Confidence to insinuate that the Establishment of these little Churches, could dissolve the temporal Laws of the Society then in Being, that their Mem-
bers

bers belonged to; of Course all temporal Power was already lodged in the Hands of the Magistrates, nor could be alienated on any Pretence whatever.

'Twas impossible then, that the same Authority should be lodged in two distinct Persons at the same Time; and if this new Sect had presumed to challenge the Legislature, where ever it spread, I leave you to imagine if an eternal Series of Miracles had not been absolutely necessary to continue it but an Age to an End.

The Rules or Orders, therefore, they had a Power to set on Foot, could be no other than such as obtain at present among our little Clubs and Societies; who may undoubtedly settle certain Articles of Agreement among themselves, to serve as Terms of Admittance to every new Member and Continuance to the Old; they may, likewise, ordain Presidents, Assistants and other Officers
of

of different Ranks and Degrees; but then it must be by the equal Consent of all, not the violent or imperious Assumption of any one; and the grand Fundamental of all must necessarily be, that they institute nothing which derogates from the the Rights of the Magistrates, or the known Laws of the Commonwealth. In like Manner these Rulers could, on no Pretence, command any Share of Property, chuse any Title, or impose any Penalty, by their own Authority; nor could that of the whole Function, even among themselves, dispense with any general Law already established, or bind themselves by any new one, which entrenched on, or was inconsistent with those of their Country. In short, as, by free Choice, they might vote an Elbow-chair at the upper End of the Table to whom they pleased; so, by voluntary Contributions, they might raise on themselves what Sums their Occasions called for; and expel what obnoxious Member they pleased;

2

which

which is the simple Original of that yet dreadful Word, Excommunication.

Thus, Gentlemen, we have a short View of the State and Government of the Primitive Church : The Apostles, as the Evidences of *Christ*, made Converts from Place to Place ; those Converts formed themselves into little Societies ; of which those that were best qualified were elected Teachers, or Remembrancers of what their first Pastors the Apostles taught : what Contributions they paid were voluntary Acts of Charity ; not for the Support of a Priesthood, but the Relief of the Poor : the Custody of this, as an Office distinct from preaching the Word, was given to Deacons ; and for Discipline, those who acted irregularly, were first reprov'd, and, in Case of Contumacy expelled.

An Institution, Gentlemen, not only innocent, but laudable, and so far from carrying with it an Aspect threatening

to enslave the World, that one would think it morally impossible it should produce any one ill Consequence ! Let us only suppose, then, that it had continued in its original Simplicity, should we as Individuals, or the whole as a Society, or all *Christendom* as in general devoted to the Faith, have been the worse for it ? Should we have missed any Advantages we at present enjoy ? Or rather should not we have been saved at a much cheaper Rate ? Should not we be free from a thousand Tyrannies, and Impositions we actually groan under ? Should we not be as free from a thousand Anxieties arising from the Fears of what we have yet to suffer ? Nay, has not every former Age found even more Reason than This to lament the miserable Exchange of Apostles for Lords, Alms for Tythes, Beseechings for Commands, and Brotherhood for Slavery ?

Yet farther, Gentlemen, if Religion is of any real Use to social Happiness,

or

or a necessary Supplement to Government, either by preventing Vice, or cultivating Virtue, does it not seem probable that these Advantages might have been as easily obtained under the Apostolic System, as the boasted Hierarchy which has been advanced on its Ruins? If it does, and 'tis manifest that, together with this Hierarchy, Tyranny, Ignorance, Cruelty, Discord, Oppression, Persecution and every Evil that could flow from the worst Vices of the worst Men, have been let loose from Hell to make Mankind irredeemably wretched; can we help regretting the Happiness we have been disappointed of? Can we help complaining of the Grievances we feel? Is it not the Dictate of Nature to enquire by whom they are inflicted, upon what Pretence, and what Obligations we are under to continue couchant under so insupportable a Load? And, if we should find the Source of our Calamities to be in the Perversion of the most beneficial Scheme to the vilest Purposes, if we

should find the most sacred Personages, the most busy to contrive, and the most active to set this infernal Project on Foot through all Ages and Nations; is there any Veil so holy that it should not be removed from before so perfidious a Scene? Is there any Character so venerable, that it should not be exposed to the whole Blaze of Truth, though it shocked the Universe with its Deformity? Is there any Man that is honest, any Man that is wise, any Man that is deceived, any Man that deserves to be free who has not an Interest in the Discovery? And ought not he to be branded as a Slave by Nature, as well as Habit, that opposed or maligned it?

Gentlemen, 'tis Time, high Time, in some Countries at least, that this noble Attempt had taken Place ——— Who is it we are to attack but *Anti-christ*, that has exalted *himself in the House of God, above all that is called God*? Who can resent our seasonable and well-intended Zeal,
but

but the proud Idol's Confederates or Slaves? What would suffer by our Success, but blind Superstition, mad Enthusiasm, encroaching Avarice, and Self-deifying Priestcraft? What would be the instant happy Effects, but in the Adult Freedom of Thought, universal Benevolence, *Roman* Public-Spirit and *Christian* Charity: And to our Youth, the Road to Knowledge and Virtue, made obvious, strait and easy, by an enlarged and sublime Education?

Suppose, Gentlemen, a Physician should come to you from a far Country, with an universal Medicine of demonstrated Efficacy for curing all Maladies but old Age; and should himself deliver it gratis to the World: nay, should die a Martyr to his own Beneficence and the Rage of his mercenary Brethren, who feared they should be undone by his unparalleled Generosity: Suppose, Gentlemen, he should leave the Secret at his Death, to be made public by his Friends to all Mankind,

Mankind, on the same disinterested Terms : and, tho' every Ingredient in it, with it's Virtues and Operations, was made plain to the meanest Capacity, suppose, after them, should arise a Race of impudent, projecting Quacks, who should pretend this acknowledged Catholicon would lose its Effect unless administred through their Hands : nay, should affirm that, by certain mysterious Words in the Recipe, the Property of the Medicine was, contrary to the declared Will of it's Author, lodged in them and their Heirs for ever ; to be retailed to their Patients, at what Price they pleased : and, in Time, that, unless they should be put in Possession of the greatest Dignities, with Plenitude of Power to tyrannize on the Estates, Bodies and Souls of Men as they pleased, this sovereign Antidote should turn into the deadliest Poison, like Aaron's Rod into a Serpent, and entirely ruin the Constitutions it was first given to restore and preserve : I say, Gentlemen, suppose all this was not a
 Sup-

Supposition, but positive Matter of Fact, what Contempt would be too bitter, what Punishment too severe for such perfidious Impostors, such impudent Corruptors, such apparent Enemies to the Good of Mankind? — I dare say, there is not a Man in *Europe* so stupid but who would instantly discover their Fraud, or so tame and cowardly who would not resent the Abuse, or so much a Valitudinarian but would despise their Threats: And yet, Gentlemen, so inconsistent are we even with ourselves, that we endure an exactly-parallel Imposition, not only with Patience, but defend it with Zeal, and esteem all those our Enemies, who would open our Eyes, to our own Folly, and persuade us to undertake our own Deliverance.

You have seen, Gentlemen, how plain, and simple a Fabric the Church was, that was built by the Hands of the Apostles; you have seen it re-established for the Sake of the People, not for the
Benefit

Benefit or aggrandizing of the Apostles themselves : Consequently they, the People, elected their new Teachers, gave their Votes in Conjunction with the Apostles in Rules of Discipline, in all the Epistles are addressed to in the first Place, before their Deacons, Presbyters or Bishops ; and even deprived their Pastors, by their own unalienable Authority, when found to be unworthy, in Spite of their sacred, indelible Character ; the Truth of which is not only witnessed by the most antient of the Fathers, but the wholesome Exercise of it mentioned with Praise by the most honest of them. — Nay, if we allow the Authority of St. Paul, the formidable Engine of Excommunication itself pertained solely to the People, as is evident from what he writes to the *Corinthians* with Respect to the Person guilty of Incest, and which he calls in another Place the *Punishment inflicted by the many* — Perhaps the declaring the Sentence might be left for Order's sake to the Overseers, or as the Clergy trans-

state it Bishop's, who, in Time, from being only the Mouth of the Church aspired to be the Head; and instead of being himself governed by the Majority as at the first, usurped an unwarrantable Power to govern all.

Even before the Death of the beloved Disciple St. John, one *Diotrephes* affected Preeminence, inveighing against that Apostle, refusing to receive the Brethren, forbidding them that would, and casting them out of the Church.

Hegefippus, says *Milton* from *Eusebius*, a grave Church-Writer of prime Antiquity affirms, that, while the Apostles were on Earth, the Depravers of Doctrine did but lurk; but they once gone, with open Forehead, they durst preach down the Truth with Falsities. Again, *Look*, says he, but a Century lower, what an universal Tetter of Impurity had invetommed every Part, Order and Degree of the Church, to omit the Lay-herd, which

F

will

will be little regarded. Those that seemed to be our Pastors, saith the same Eusebius, overturning the Law of God's Worship, burnt in Contention one towards another, and increasing in Hatred and Bitterness, outrageously sought to uphold Lordship, and command as it were a Tyranny.

In one of the Epistles, ascribed to *Ignatius*, 'tis asserted that a Bishop hath Power over all, beyond all Government and Authority whatever. And in another, we find a second Passage as remarkable. *SOLOMON said, My Son honour GOD and the King. But I say honour GOD, and the BISHOP as High-Priest, bearing the Image of GOD, according to his Ruling, and of CHRIST according to his priesting, and AFTER HIM, honour the KING.*

Thus early, Gentlemen, did this aspiring Temper of Christian Pride display itself, and in such ridiculously-indecent Terms was it expressed: Nor was this
Pre-

Presumption of theirs confined to Words only ; but was felt as well as heard : and, however dubious the apostolic Succession appears, that of *Diotrephes* will even admit of Demonstration.

But, if these thundering Claims are in there own Nature amazing, how much more so will they appear, when 'tis considered from whence they came ; from such as were fed originally out of the public Alms-Basket, and (tho' *we* annex the same Ideas of Pomp and Luxury to the Bishops of old, as we are Eye-witnesses of now) from such as were then no more than simple Parish-Priests, as the late learned Lord *King* has very clearly prov'd, obliged to do all Duties themselves, as being too poor to hire a Deputy, and without so much as a Chapel of Ease in their whole Diocese. Nay, more from such as in the second Stage of Tradition, yet authentic, were almost personally acquainted with their divine Master, who taught such opposite Doc-

trines; and knew they had no Powers of any Kind which were not derived from, and depended intirely on the Benevolence of the People.

Yes, Gentlemen, Father *Paul* who, tho' a Priest, was a Lover of Truth, declares, in so many Words, that the Government of the Church was in the Beginning purely democratical; nor do we find that it lost it's Integrity, till that free, equal and natural Constitution was destroyed. But, says he, as the Church increased in Numbers, the Faithful, neglecting to assist any longer at those public Assemblies, and withdrawing themselves to the Cares of their own Families, the Government became Aristocratical, which brought all Affairs to have their Determinations by Councils, excepting as to Elections, which continued popular still.

That is to say, in other Words, as soon as they had prevailed on the People to
trust

trust them they betrayed them; and instead of acting as Delegates they fraudulently usurped a Sort of ecclesiastic Supremacy which had no Measure but their Appetite; no Reason but their Will: Exacting Contributions as Matter of Right, not of Charity; engrossing those Contributions wholly to their own Use, and chasing the Poor, for whose Relief they were first raised, with a violent Hand from their merciless Gates: Disdaining to officiate in the Functions of their Calling, but deputing others to fill their Places, and sending them forth, according to the Saying referred to by *Jesus, to reap that whereon they bestowed no Labour*; and become an eternal Encumbrance on the Industry of their Fellow-creatures. They themselves, mean while, slumbering in Indolence, and fattening on Luxury; or ambitiously toiling to be important at Courts, and unite a suitable Proportion of Civil to strengthen and enlarge their spiritual Jurisdiction.

These,

These, Gentlemen, were the gradual Effects of trusting the Dominion of the Church in the Hands of such treacherous Guardians. But first, that many Headed-monster the *Hierarchy*, like the Beast in the *Revelations*, enthroned itself on the Ruins of Holiness, imposed it's enslaving Foot on the Neck of prostrate Devotion, and set the stigmatizing Brand of Laity on the Foreheads of those who had hitherto been esteemed a Nation of Priests, alike sanctified to the Lord.

Hence it was deemed an Abomination for God's own People to approach him in public Prayer or Praise, but by the Mediation of some go-between Priest, or his Hireling-Curate; and they were enjoined, on the severest Penalties, not to meddle with the mysterious Sacraments, but from the Hands of some consecrated Deputy.

Are

Are we to wonder then, Gentlemen, at the instant Consequences of these tyrannous Innovations? or that, as *Milton* severely says, *the People of God, redeemed and washed with Christ's Blood, and dignified with so many glorious Titles of Saints and Sons in the Gospel, are now no better reputed than impure Ethnics and Lay-Dogs? Stones and Pillars, and Crucifixes, he goes on, have now the Honour, and the Alms due to Christ's living Members: The Table of Communion, now become a Table of Separation, stands like an exalted Platform upon the Brow of the Quire, fortified with Bulwarks and Barricados to keep off the prophane Touch of the Laicks, while the obscene and surfeited Priest scruples not to paw and mammock the sacramental Bread, as familiarly as his Tavern-Bisケット. And the ill Effects of this Anti-christian Separation, we find as strongly painted in another spirited Passage of the same inimitable Author. For we have*

I learnt

learn't that the scornful Term of Laic,
the consecrating of Temples, Carpets and
Table-cloths, the railing in of a repug-
nant and contradictive Mount Sinai in
the Gospel, as if the Touch of a Lay-
Christian, who is nevertheless God's liv-
ing Temple, could prophane dead Judaism; the
Exclusion of Christ's People from the
Offices of holy Discipline thro' the Pride
of an usurping Clergy, causes the rest to
have an unworthy and abject Opinion of
themselves, to approach to holy Duties
with a slavish Fear, and to unholy
Doings with a familiar Boldness. For,
seeing such a wide, and terrible Distance
between religious Things and themselves,
and that, in Respect of a wooden Table,
and the Perimeter of holy Ground about
it, a Flagon-pot, and a Linnen-corporal,
the Priest esteems their Lay-skip unbal-
lowed and unclean, they fear Religion, with
such a Fear as loves not, and think
the Purity of the Gospel too pure for
them; and that every Uncleanness is
more

more suitable to their unconsecrated Estate.

But to proceed, Gentlemen: One would naturally conclude that such remarkable Events could not but be the Effects of as remarkable Conduct and Dexterity: But, tho' we should allow the *Fox* had ever a notable Ascendancy in the Church, the *Wolf* has had more; and 'tis by Rapine, as well as Fraud, that they have filled their Dens with such incredible Heaps of Prey: It must be own'd however, that the Prevalency of the *A's* among the Laity has contributed as much to this amazing Success of theirs, as their own pious Artifices. Yes, Ignorance and Superstition in us, have answered just the same Ends, as Policy and Contrivance in them, and we learn from History, that no Snare so gross could be set, but what Bigotry was blind enough to be taken in.

G

Their

Their Endeavours then to reduce us to this State are not to be reckoned among their most pregnant Stratagems; and as a small Sample of those Endeavours be pleased to accept, Gentlemen, a Quotation or Two from the learned Notes upon the late new Translation of the Gospel-writing. In the first Place making a Disquisition into the Genuineness of the Epistle fathered upon *James*; and, taking Occasion by the Way to give us a Sketch of the Ability, and Integrity of those Fathers who undertook to settle the Canon of the New-Testament; he introduces a Passage from *Pappus* in his Synodicon to the Council of *Nice*; who asserts (no Doubt to excite the greatest Veneration in the Vulgar for their holy Religion, or rather the Decisions of their Priests) *That, having promiscuously put all the Books under the Communion-table in the Church, they besought the Lord, that the inspired Records might get upon the Table, while the*

the spurious ones remained underneath, which accordingly happened. Such a Phenomenon, continues this Writer, as this must have irrefragably convinced all the Heathen Philosophers and Heretics, without the Pale of the Church; provided they had happily been within Doors. It must have struck them for ever dumb to see the Parchment-Rolls spontaneously heave, and, disengaging themselves from the spurious Lumber, rise like Ezekiel's dry Bones, and mount in Harmony upon the Table. At such a Sight as this, they would have swallowed the Canon with less Reluctance, than the Prophet did his Roll——He farther adds, that nothing less than such a Sight as this could sanctify the fiery Zeal, which breathes in Letters of Blood throughout the Edict published by the first Christian Emperor, to destroy the Writings of Arius on Pain of Death, as those of Porphyry had been before.

In another Place, he farther tells us that *Jerom* complains of great Corruptions in the Manuscripts of the *Greek Testament* in his Time ; and from *Origen* long before him, he quotes the following Words at large ——— *But now, Alas ! what with the Blunders of Transcribers ; what with the impious Temerity of correcting the Text. What with the Licentiousness of those, who interpolate or expunge just what they please, 'tis plain the Copies do strangely disagree*———The same Father, he farther tells us, in one of his *Epistles*, still complains that his own Works were adulterated, as it were before his own Eyes. They did not spare him, it seems, while he was alive ; no wonder *Ruffinus* gave him no Quarter when he was dead ; arbitrarily changing, adding, and castrating the Father without Mercy ——— But what was all this, He goes on, to that general Conflagration of whole Editions enacted by those grand Incendaries, *Constantine* and *Theodosius*;

dofius ; To that general Inundation of counterfeit Martyrologies, Decretals, Councils and Charters, which overwhelmed the World for feveral Centuries, particularly in the Age of Charles the great ? An Age, fays Balufius, one of the moft favourable for Impoftors that ever was known, by Reason of that ftupendous Ignorance, which had feized the Bifhops, as well as the inferior Clergy——Forgery was then grown to fuch a Head, that even the vigorous Laws of Charlemagne and Otho were but a Sheet of Parchment to dam a Spring-tide ; Truth and Honour and Virtue were fled ! The Times were fo deplorable——Even Monks bewail the Knavery of Monks !

Behold, Gentlemen, what a bleffed Outside is here fketched of the Fathers of the Church by the fkilful Hand of one of their own Brethren ! Imagine with yourfelves what an Effect it would have if it had been drawn large as the Life, and with every Feature finished

to

to the greatest Pitch of Exactness! —
This is but a Miniature, and not above
half the Figure neither.

But who would have Patience to perfect
the Similitude, or set it forth in its own
proper Colours? or say 'twas done, what
Resemblance would it bear to the Cha-
racter of an *Apostle*? what one Fea-
ture would tally with the Image of
Christianity in the Gospel? or indeed,
what Comparisons would it bear with
the faded Reliques of antique Philo-
sophy?

Says our admired Milton, *I had spent
some Years in the Stories of those Greek
and Roman Exploits, wherein I found
many Things both nobly done and worthily
spoken. When coming in the Method of
Time, to that Age wherein the Church
had obtained a Christian Emperor, I so
prepared myself, as being now to read
Examples of Wisdom and Goodness a-
mong those that were foremost in the
Church,*

Church, not elsewhere to be paralleled. But, to the Amazement of what I expected, Readers, I found it all quite contrary; excepting in some very few, nothing but Ambition, Corruption, Contention and Combustion; insomuch that I love the Historian Socrates, who, in the Proem to his fifth Book, professes, 'He was fain to intermix Affairs of State, for that it would be an extreme Annoyance to bear in a continued Discourse, the endless Brabbles, and Counter-plottings of the Bishops.' And a little lower he quotes Gregory Nazianzen affirming to Procopius, that of any Council, or Meeting of Bishops he never saw good End; nor any Remedy thereby of Evil in the Church, but rather an Increase. For, says he, their Contentions and Desire of Lording no Tongue can express——So mischievous a Taint had Christianity received, tho' so innocent and meritorious in itself, by flowing thro' such envenomed Channels.

And now, Gentlemen, having more than once quoted this first *Christian* Emperor, and second *David* of the Priests, it may not be impertinent to enquire why he has been so extravagantly magnified by ecclesiastic Writers of old, and why he still continues the favourite Son of the Church to this Day? Was it for murdering the noble *Commodus* his Nephew, or *Crispus* the eldest and most deserving of his Sons, or his Wife *Fausta*, or destroying Numbers of his Friends? Was it for his sanguinary Wars, his severe Exactions, or his frequent Cruelties to obnoxious *Christians* under the Name of Heretics? No, surely, these are not very happy Materials for eternal Panegyric—But if he was poor in Virtue, he was rich in Devotion; if he had not natural Affection, he abounded in holy Zeal; and what he wanted in Gratitude to his Friends, was amply supplied by his Prodigality to the Priests.

Yes

Yes, 'tis to him they owe their Temporalities, their Power, their Pomp, their Riches, their Grandeur, and even many of their ostentatious Ceremonies. He found them Beggars, but left them Princes; and whereas before, like *Moses*, they had only a Prospect of the promised Land, he, like another *Joshua*, put them in Possession of it—— On the other Hand, the Priests, not to be ungrateful to so notable a Benefactor to their Order, have not only drawn an artificial Veil over his grievous Crimes, but dressed him up with all the Virtues they could plunder from the Heathens his Predecessors. 'Twas they dubbed him the Great, the Pious, the Valiant, the Invincible, the August, and what not? And his idolized Name has been made a Reproach to all untractable Princes ever since,

Not indeed that this is a Favour peculiar to him, for whoever condescend-

H

ed

ed to be equally their Tool, has been equally belied with their mercenary Praises: Nay, to this Hour let a *Nero*, a *Caligula*, or a second *Constantine*, yoke the Laws to drag the Churches-Plough, and he shall be canonized, or deified if he likes it better; tho' *Lucifer* had to the full as good a Title to the Honour.

Machiavel says, Gentlemen, that every Constitution must be maintained on the same Principles it was first established; we are not to wonder therefore, that when Religion brought forth Riches, as was observed of old, the Daughter destroyed the Mother. From this boasted Reign, therefore, we may date the utter Ruin of Primitive Christianity, and from the same Era we may as safely reckon that *Antichristian Prelacy* exchanged the Kingdom of Heaven (which was only the Object of Faith, and appeared to them no Doubt a Castle in the Air) for one substantial, visible

ble, and which according to them, fadeth not away.

Hence *Sulpitius*, speaking of the Bishops of those Times, observes, that *they gape after Possessions, they tend Lands, and Livings, they couer over their Gold, they buy and sell; and if there be any that neither possess, nor traffic, that which is worse, they set still and expect Gifts, and prostitute every Inducement of Grace, every holy Thing to sale.*

The gradual Pyramid of the Hierarchy, whose broad Base covered so large an Extent of the Globe, had now its aspiring Pinnacle in the Skies: The bent Shoulders of the Laity were made the rude Materials of the groaning Foundation; on them rose an Infinity of Monks, Fryars, Deacons, Priests and Confessors; above them a Crowd of Arch-Deacons, Proctors, Surrogates, and all other Implements of Church-Power; on them Canons, Prebends, Deans and Suffragans;

Over them again the venerable Bishops; then the most reverend the Arch-Bishops, then Metropolitans, then Patriarchs, and, to tip the whole his Holiness the Pope: while, chained to the four Angles below with ecclesiastic Fetters, were fixed the Kings and Princes of the Earth, to keep the whole Machine together, on Pain of being destroyed underneath the mighty Ruins.

Such, Gentlemen, is the vast Fabric of the universal Church; too immensely huge either to be raised, or levelled in a Day!

The reverend Fathers, having, now tasted the Sweets of Court-Luxury under *Constantine*, proceeded full Speed to accomplish their greedy Project of turning all they touched into Wealth, Pomp and Power: Accordingly in less than eighty Years they had carried their Point so far, that the Bishops of *Rome* and *Alexandria* actually assumed the Port, and exercised the Authority
of

of Princes; and, when the *Greek* Emperors *Phillippicus*, *Leo* and others, with the Advice and Assent of 338 Bishops decreed the Abolishment of Images out of the Churches, the first of these venerable Prelates not only refuses Obedience, but seizes *Rome* and its Territories, usurps the Sovereignty, absolves all *Italy* from their Allegiance to the Emperor, and all this, as *Milton* has it, merely because he obeyed God's Commandment in abolishing Idolatry.

But the holy Father did not stop here: To preserve securely what he had got unjustly, he takes upon him to dispose of Kingdoms to others, as well as carve them out for himself, by dethroning *Chilporick* King of *France*, to make way for *Pepin*, and thereby bind him to his Interests. His next Step is to call his ultramontane Protector into *Italy* against *Astulphus* the *Lombard*, who had taken a martial Fancy to his Holiness's new Dominion. *Pepin* obeys the Summons, marches to his Relief,

Over them again the venerable Bishops; then the most reverend the Arch-Bishops, then Metropolitans, then Patriarchs, and, to tip the whole his Holiness the Pope: while, chained to the four Angles below with ecclesiastic Fetters, were fixed the Kings and Princes of the Earth, to keep the whole Machine together, on Pain of being destroyed underneath the mighty Ruins.

Such, Gentlemen, is the vast Fabric of the universal Church; too immensely huge either to be raised, or levelled in a Day!

The reverend Fathers, having now tasted the Sweets of Court-Luxury under *Constantine*, proceeded full Speed to accomplish their greedy Project of turning all they touched into Wealth, Pomp and Power; Accordingly in less than eighty Years they had carried their Point so far, that the Bishops of *Rome* and *Alexandria* actually assumed the Port, and exercised the Authority of

of Princes; and, when the *Greek* Emperors *Phillippicus*, *Leo* and others, with the Advice and Assent of 338 Bishops decreed the Abolishment of Images out of the Churches, the first of these venerable Prelates not only refuses Obedience, but seizes *Rome* and its Territories, usurps the Sovereignty, absolves all *Italy* from their Allegiance to the Emperor, and all this, as *Milton* has it, merely because he obeyed God's Commandment in abolishing Idolatry.

But the holy Father did not stop here: To preserve securely what he had got unjustly, he takes upon him to dispose of Kingdoms to others, as well as carve them out for himself, by dethroning *Chilporick* King of *France*, to make way for *Pepin*, and thereby bind him to his Interests. His next Step is to call his ultramontane Protector into *Italy* against *Astulphus* the *Lombard*, who had taken a martial Fancy to his Holiness's new Dominion. *Pepin* obeys the Summons, marches to his Relief,

lief, and wins for him the whole Exarchate of *Ravenna*; which, when called upon to restore to the Empire, together with *Rome* itself, the Pope claims them both as the Churches Patrimony, solemnly devoted to it by the Hands of the Conqueror—In a Word, Gentlemen, the whole Series of this infamous Acquisition is one of the blackest in History: Letters, said to be drop'd from Heaven, being wrote in the Name of *St. Peter* to command Aid and Assistance on the Penalty of Damnation; Miracles being forged; Visions seen, and all Manner of holy Jugglings practised, to delude the *French* into an Opinion, that his Holiness could sanctify even Fraud and Treason, and make Rebellion itself the Cause of *God*.

From this Time forward, Gentlemen, the blessed Consequences of priestly Ambition and Tyranny appear characterized in Letters of Blood thro' almost every Article of their shocking Story.

Be

Be pleased to accept of a short Specimen from the disinterested Pen of the celebrated Father Paul. Popes were then excommunicated by their Successors; and their Acts cassed and annulled; not excepting the very Administration of the Sacraments; six Popes were driven out, and detroned by those who aspired to their Places. Two Popes were put to Death, and Pope Stephen the Eighth, wounded in the Face, with so much Deformity, that he never after appeared in public. Theodora, a famous Courtesan, by the Interest and Faction she had then in Rome, got her professed Lover chosen Pope, who was called John the Tenth; and John the Eleventh was chosen Pope at the Age of twenty Years, the Bastard of another Pope, dead eighteen Years before. And, in short, such a Series of wild Disorders gave Occasion to Historians to say, that, those Times produced not Popes, but Monsters.

Cardinal

Cardinal *Baronius*, that great Champion for ecclesiastic Tyranny, being greatly embarrassed to excuse these detestable Proceedings, which he could not deny or conceal, is indeed pleased to acknowledge the Church was often without a Pope, but never without a Head; *Christ* its spiritual Head, tho' in Heaven, never abandoning it: which gives Occasion to Father *Paul* to conclude very shrewdly, that then it was plain a Pope was not necessary to the Existence of the Church at all; since it could preserve itself, under such extreme Corruptions, without one.

If, therefore, that singularly honest Churchman, at so great a Distance of Time, could make so apt an Use of this involuntary Concession of the Cardinals; can one sufficiently admire at the invincible Blindness and Stupidity of those bigotted Ages, who, tho' living Witnesses of the Wickedness of the Clergy

Clergy, and in a Manner, the Martyrs of their Tyranny and Oppression, should, nevertheless continue their Adorers and Slaves, without one generous Thought to make Use of the glorious Opportunity for the working out their own Deliverance, by exposing their Ambition, their Avarice, their Cruelties, their Profuseness, their Sensuality, and every other Vice that is a Disgrace to human Nature, and that would make a Layman blush even to hear named?

But this was so far from being the Case, Gentlemen, that, says Father Paul, *with a supine Neglect of Spirituals, the Spirit of defending their Temporals seemed to rise in Proportion.* And tho' the Popes made no Distinction betwixt Actions good or bad that were in their Power, nor were deterred by the Wickedness of them, considering every Opportunity of engaging great Men in their Interests, as an Increase of their own Power, the People, either thro' Simplicity or Fears, were

I

awed

awed into an Approbation of what they could not hinder; whence grew the Opinion that an Approbation from the Court of Rome repaired or cancelled all Errors.

And what should be the new tho' happy Expedient of these *Man-Haters*, as *Milton* justly calls them, to extend their incroaching Claims and tyrannous Exactions, amid the universal Odium of universal Vice but the fantastic Terrors of Excommunication, which now, for the first Time, began to be fulminated against all that opposed the Growth of these merciless Impositions? ————— Excommunication, Gentlemen, which originally borrowed of the *Jews*, contained in the primitive Ages of the Church all ecclesiastic Authority; being, as before hinted, no more than the expelling of an obnoxious Member out of the Communion and Society of the Faithful; and even this not to be put in Force by any single Person, tho' an Apostle, or even the whole Twelve, without an express Deputation for that Purpose; but by
the

the Congregation in general; every Christian present having a Voice; all Voices being free and equal, and the Majority giving the Decision, tho' the Elder or Overseer might tell Noses, or pronounce the Issue——Of course then, no Man, or set of Men whatever, either nominally, or really the Successors of *Peter*, had an exclusive Right to brandish this ecclesiastic Thunder: and, of Course, for these reverend Intruders to monopolize it to themselves, in order to bully the People out of their Senses, as well as their Liberty and Wealth, was only to maintain one Usurpation by another.

But, Gentlemen, granting the Clergy, instead of the Church, had the sole Right of constituting one of these terrestrial *Jupiters*, and that he again may subdivide his spiritual Fire-Arms among as many vapouring Understrappers as he pleases: Granting, likewise, that these privileged *Salmonii*, were allowed to work up their Apparatus to what Pitch

of Terror they would, as that the Gates of Heaven shut spontaneously the very Moment the Priest gives the Word, and that the Devil on the other Hand, was as ready to play his under-Part in the solemn Farce : I say, Gentlemen, granting all this, for Argument's-sake to be true, surely the Crimes, that incur these high Penalties should have been numbered, like the Commandments of God to *Moses*, and engraven on monumental Tables of Adamant, in eternal Characters, intelligible to the meanest Capacity, and obvious to the weakest Memory : Surely this is what both Reason and Justice would require, and, consequently, it must be with equal Horror and Detestation, that they would apprehend them left at Discretion to such narrow, sordid, mercenary, malignant Minds as are the Growth of Cells and Colleges ; by Habit, Education and almost Nature the sworn Enemies of Mankind !

But,

But, alas ! Gentlemen, the contrary of this equitable Doctrine prevailed, and the Laity were such Idiots as to conclude this Authority was so strongly stamped on the apostolic Mission, that no Weakness, or Wickedness would erase the Impression : Nay, what was infinitely more sottish, they themselves added temporal Penalties, that put the very Equity of Redemption out of their own Hands, and made those villanous Scare-crows a real Terror to the whole World.

Hence they rivetted their own Chains; hence the Priest actually claimed Precedency of the Prince, and more than shared with him in the Power and Privileges of Empire : Hence they subjugated both the Souls and Bodies of Men to their Tyranny, and engrossed so much of their Property that their insatiate Appetites thought all too little. Hence, in some Sense, they domineer'd

over the greatest Layman, even to Kings and Emperors, and, at the same Time, exempted from the Jurisdiction of all Courts but their own, the meanest Ecclesiastics—Hence, wherever the Blessing of the Gospel reached, they instantly turned it into the most affecting Curse; making a Market of the holy Sacraments, privileging Vice, and persecuting Virtue; hence they fostered Ignorance as their dearest Friend, and expelled Knowledge as their most formidable Enemy. Hence, like a Contagion, they blasted Liberty wherever they came, and with ten Thousand artificial Blinds diverted the honest Seeker from the Ways of Truth. Hence they not only made Merchandise of the Faith, but monopolized the whole Trade to themselves. Hence they spread Discord and Confusion wherever they came, and were never so well-pleased as when their Commissions were wrote in Blood. Hence, in that one Quarrel with the Emperors concerning the Investitures, which

which lasted Fifty-six Years, Seventy-eight Battles were fought, and many Millions of Christian Men were butchered to gratify the Avarice, feed the Pride, and flake the Vengeance of Priests; and hence 'tis demonstrable that Church-Anarchy would not have bred half the Mischief that Church-Government has done in such infernal Hands: consequently it could never be ordained by *God*; and his sacred Name is never more abused than when prostituted to sanctify their inhuman Tyrannies.

F I N I S.



which lasted Fifty-six Years, Seventy-
eight Battles were fought, and many
Millions of Christian Men were butcher-
ed to gratify the Avarice, feed the
Pride, and like the Vengeance of Priests;
and hence, is demonstrable that Church-
Anarchy would not have bred half the
Mischiefs that Church-Government has
done in such infernal Wars: consequently
it could never be justified by God; and
his sacred Name more abused
than when profaned to justify their
inhuman Tyrannies.



Printed by W. I. & S.

